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NOTE

This volume is a collection of a series of articles on KALIDASA'S RAGHUVAMSA contributed by the late Srimati Padma Ranganathan for the New Delhi edition of 'The Sunday Standard' during April-September 1962 when she was an Assistant Editor in the Indian Express. Encouraged by the reception which these articles had from the reading public, she had nursed a desire to publish them in book form.

For over a decade, Srimati Padma Ranganathan studied with Sri S. Ananthachari many classical and philosophical pieces in Sanskrit literature. He helped her in writing this series of articles also and has appropriately undertaken the editing of this publication to fulfil her wishes, though unfortunately, posthumously.

This study is a compact pen-picture of Raghuvamsa. It contains the kernel of the Mahakavya and attempts to bring out within a brief compass the spirit behind the Poet's soul-stirring verses as also the lofty ideas enshrined in his masterly work.

This volume is now published in memory of one who, in the midst of various distractions, kept up her love for and study of our ancient literature.

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KALIDASA — A PROFILE

Kalidasa ! What a name to conjure with ! Oh ! What sweetness flows out of this name — the name that has captivated the hearts of millions of Sanskrit lovers in the East and the West !

Many European scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had indeed devoted their life time to the study of the works of the famous Indian poets such as Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Sudraka and Harsha, and in attempting the translations of their writings. All with one voice have hailed Kalidasa as the greatest among the poets. The oft-quoted verse in this regard is :

पुरा कवीनां गणनाप्रसङ्गे कनिष्ठिकाधिष्ठितकालिदासः ।
अद्यापि तत्तुल्यकवेरभावात् अनामिका सार्थकनामधेया ॥

"While once the poets were being counted, Kalidasa (as being the first) occupied the last finger. But the ring-finger remained true to its name (अनामिका nameless), since his second has not yet been found (by whom it can be occupied)."

Goethe, the noted German poet, holds Kalidasa in the highest esteem and it is very exhilarating to read his quatrain about the poet's play — SAKUNTALA.

"Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline,
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,
Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine ?
I name thee, O Sakuntala ! and all at once is said."

"This quatrain seems to be a small thing like the light of an electric bulb, but it lights up the whole drama in an instant and reveals its inner nature In Goethe's words, 'Sakuntala' blends together the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its maturity. It combines heaven and earth in one." Poet Tagore in his 'Sakuntala' plumbs out the significance of this stanza in an enchanting way.

Every student of Sanskrit is taught the memorable verse—

काव्येषु नाटकं रम्यं तत्र रम्या शकुन्तला ।
तत्रापि च चतुर्थोऽङ्कः तत्र श्लोकचतुष्टयम् ।।

Among Kavyas, the drama is the most charming. Among Dramas, 'The Sakuntala' is the most delighting. Even there, the fourth Act is the best. And lastly, the four verses therein are sublimely beautiful.

One finds in Kalidasa's works the unique style of oriental art in poetics, the mellifluous flow of language and rhythm and a sublimated grace of sentiments throughout. The American author, Prof. A. W. Ryder, eloquently observes :

> "Centuries of intellectual darkness in Europe have sometimes coincided with centuries of light in India. The Vedas were composed for the most part before Homer ; Kalidasa and his contemporaries lived while Rome was tottering under barbarian assault"

Such copious tributes to this King of Poets abound in the books of Sanskrit Classical literature written by foreign scholars.

Despite such tributes, some western critics have been rather uncharitable in their remarks about Indian poets on the latter's indifference in writing out their autobiographies. Personal history, of course, enables the reader to fix the poet's date, when and how he lived. But it is amusing that the western critics should have magnified this 'lack of personal

sketches' by the poets themselves. Imagine! Would it not be possible for those who could produce such rapturous epic poems and plays, to narrate their own lives in a charming way out of their own pen? One may ask — "Then, why this silence on their part in this respect?" The point is worth considering indeed.

A plausible answer for their not bothering to write out their autobiographies could be that they must have yearned to be humble, unassuming and self-effacing. They had a firm conviction that one's writings *alone* would bring to one an undying name and fame, but *not* details of one's own personal history. In this, they were more than right. To the Indian thinker, what a man *thought* and *wrote* is far more important than *how he lived and died.*

Is it not that the western savants are carried away to the study of the Indian classics more by the sublime contents of the lofty compositions rather than by the biographies of their authors?

The traditional life story of Kalidasa runs thus:

Born of a Brahmin family in Ujjain, he loses his parents in his childhood. He is brought up by a cowherd as a member of his family. He grows into a handsome youth, of course, all the while remaining unlettered. The King of his country has a daughter who is well-versed in all sciences. She seeks a husband equally literate. As it happens, every one who comes as a suitor, is discomfited in arguments with her.

The minister's brilliant and versatile son meets with the same fate. The father is enraged at the insult inflicted on his son. His mind is now set on avenging the Princess. He orders the unlettered youth to be brought to the palace and proclaims him as Guru of the minister's family. He cleverly manages to guile the Princess to accept the 'Guru' as her husband.

She falls a prey to the 'plot' and when the truth comes to light, she bids her husband to worship the goddess

Kali. The husband prays fervently and the propitiated goddess at once blesses him with the power of speech and writing. Out springs from his lips the melodious 'SYAMALA DANDAKA' and he is thereafter known to the world as Kali-dasa or the one devoted to Kali.

On his return to the palace, the bride asks him :

अस्ति कश्चित् वागर्थः ?

With these three words, the poet commences his three great poems—Kumarasambhava, Meghaduta and Raghuvamsa.

The story continues that a King of the neighbouring country announces a huge reward to one who completes his half-composed stanza. Kalidasa who hears the news spells out instantly the other half of the verse to his mistress who, anxious to secure the reward for herself, does away with him.

One tradition is to the effect that Kalidasa lived at the Court of Vikramaditya, as is contained in the memorial verse—

धन्वन्तरिक्षपणकामरसिंहशंकुवेतालभट्टघटकर्परकालिदासाः ।
ख्यातो वराहमिहिरो नृपतेस्सभायां रत्नानि वै वररुचिर्नव विक्रमस्य ॥

which says that Dhanvantari, Kshapanaka, Amarasimha, Sanku, Vetalabhatta, Ghatakarpara, Kalidasa, Varahamihira, and Vararuchi were the 'nine gems' of Vikrama's court. On the other hand, there are numerous anecedotes which say that Kalidasa adorned the court of King Bhoja, the great patron of Sanskrit learning.

Thus his date has remained a controversial one. Some assign him to the 1st Century before Christ while others place him in the fifth and sixth centuries after Christ. There is the 11th Century theory also !

Attempts have been made by Indian as well as Western scholars to fix his date by sifting both internal and external literary evidence ; but it is unfortunate there has been no unanimity of opinion in this respect. Even in regard to the

chronology of his works, which are commonly accepted to be only seven, different views persist.

Judged from the traditional life above as well as from the style of his writings, one is led to believe that the order should be — amongst poems: Kumarasambhava, Meghaduta and Raghuvamsa and in dramas: Malavikagnimitra, Vikramorvasiya and Abhignana Sakuntala. The authorship of the seventh — the poem RITUSAMHARA —is still a contentious one but commentators have more or less agreed to treat this work as his.

There is no doubt that the Raghuvamasa and the Sakuntala must have been written by the poet when he had attained mastery over the language and maturity and clearness in his ideas and thoughts. His genius is evident in these works. Very subtle abstruse sayings and teachings contained in the Vedas and its Branches, the Upanishads and the Smritis, the Epics and the Puranas, the Gita and the Samkhya Philosophy and the like, have received a marvellous treatment at his hands.

His description of nature stands out superb and unsurpassed. In his similies, he is yet to find an equal. At his depicting the sentiments of love and pathos, foreign scholars, let alone Indians, have poured forth their praise and adoration. The contents of his works act as a mirror of life reflecting the geography of the country and customs and manners prevailing in his times; that is why we come to the conclusion that he must have widely travelled throughout the length and breadth of India.

Kalidasa had a keen eye for observing the phenomena in nature in all its varieties. He produced them in picturesque scenes in his creations. His portraiture of the traits of men and women is strikingly happy and he had the capacity to depict animal instincts too in an equally telling fashion. His flair for understanding human psychology is *par excellence*.

Causeless smiles of an infant child,
Pretty pranks of a little lad,
Lovely sports of a charming boy,
Deeds of valour of heroic youth,
Geography of this ancient land,
Princess's marriage with a choice of her own,
Husband's wail over a beloved's death,
Worthlessness of the earthly ties,
Coveting beauties of the Season Spring,
Shining ideals in Rama's life,
Aerial journeys over land and sea,
'Pathos' rising to its height,
Pangs of love of a parted pair,
Features true of a devoted wife,
Snowy scences of the Himalayan range,
Monstrous beasts of the watery waste,
The way of making a secret love,
Healthy counsels of seers great,

these topics — and many more—have received such incomparably graphic and thrilling description at the hands of this poet as to produce a lasting touching effect on the reader.

KALIDASA'S RAGHUVAMSA

CHAPTER I — KING DILIPA

The Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa is one of the most popular Mahakavyas in Sanskrit literature. It conforms in entirety to the definition of a Mahakavya and centres round many a hero of sublime virtues.

Emotions of love, pathos and valour figure beautifully in this poem. Events have been linked together in a chain-like form. Panoramic descriptions of mountains and seas; of groves and forests; of cities and seasons; of weddings and battles; of love and separation; of earth and heaven; of men and women; of birds and beasts; of sports in water and on land — one finds here. In Raghuvamsa we see a rare commingling of all these diverse features of a Mahakavya.

Most of the Sanskrit poets owe their inspiration for their writings to Sage Valmeeki. They have invariably chosen their 'plots' from the Sage's 'magnum opus' — the Ramayana, the first and the grandest epic of this land. Kalidasa too is no exception to this. He gratefully acknowledges this in his Raghuvamsa when he says that he treads the path of the great writers who went before him :—

पूर्वसूरिभिः कृतवाग्द्वारे अस्मिन् वंशे मे गतिः अस्ति ।

(canto 1—verse 4)

The Ramayana contains a verse which foretells, as it were, the everlasting nature of the epic :

यावत् स्यास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ।
तावत् रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

(Balakanda, Sarga 2, verse 36)

"As long as mountain ranges stand
And rivers flow upon the earth,
So long will this Ramayana
Survive upon the lips of men."

And Kalidasa who follows in the footsteps of Valmeeki has likewise secured immortality both for himself and for his works.

It is obvious that the title of this great work—RAGHU-VAMSA—should have suggested itself to Kalidasa from a passage in the Ramayana itself. The line,

रघुवंशस्य चरितं चकार भगवानृषिः
(Bal. 3. 9)

might have appealed to him most for naming his Kavya.

The Poem can be conveniently split into three parts. Cantos 1—9 give a splendid account of the Solar Kings — Dilipa, Raghu, Aja and Dasaratha (the four immediate predecessors of Rama, the Divine hero of the great Epic). Cantos 10—15 contain the kernel of the Epic. The ideal episodes in the Ramayana figure beautifully in these cantos One is amazed at Kalidasa's genius when he brings out in one small canto of his, what is told in hundreds of chapters in the great Epic! So also his imagination excels when he writes a full canto for depicting the idea found in a few chapters of the original.

Cantos 16—19 describe certain descendants of Rama, from Kusa down to Agnivarna. The names of Kings referred to in this work are more or less identical with those mentioned in the Vishnu Purana of Parasara. The poem ends abruptly giving rise to a feeling that the poet must have passed away suddenly before he could complete it.

The canon of poetics lays down :

आशीर्नमस्क्रियावस्तुनिर्देशो वापि तन्मुखम्

Every poetic composition should open with a blessing pronounced on its readers (आशीः) or a salutation by the

author to his favourite deity (नमस्क्रिया) or a reference to an object concerning the subject matter (वस्तुनिर्देश). All the dramas of Kalidasa belong to the first category. While his 'Raghuvamsa' belongs to the second, his "Kumarasambhava" is a typical example of the third category.

Kalidasa begins his 'Raghuvamsa' with a salutation to Siva and Parvati:

वागर्थाविव सम्पृक्तौ वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये ।
जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ ॥

"For the correct grasping of words and their sense, I bow to Parvati and Parameswara who are the parents of the universe and are connected together like words and their meaning."

The poem begins with a simile for which the poet is renowned. We come across hundreds of such apt and thrilling comparisons throughout this work.

मन्दः कवियशःप्रार्थी गमिष्याम्युपहास्यताम्

What an amazing humility! The *facile princeps* among poets to call himself as 'dull of intellect' (मन्दः) is an instance of his unassuming nature and certainly singles him out as a model for the later poets!

Kalidasa has heard and read of the noble virtues of the Kings of Raghu's race. Those qualities revolve, as if seen from a kaleidoscope, in his mind over and over again and he highlights them enchantingly:

सोऽहं

आजन्मशुद्धानां आफलोदयकर्मणाम् ।
आसमुद्रक्षितीशानां आनाकरथवर्त्मनाम् ॥
यथाविधिहुताग्नीनां यथाकामार्चितार्थिनाम् ।
यथापराधदण्डानां यथाकालप्रबोधिनाम् ॥
त्यागाय संभृतार्थानां सत्याय मितभाषिणाम् ।
यशसे विजिगीषूणां प्रजायै गृहमेधिनाम् ॥

Yet all these riches and power, fame and virtues, bring no joy to him. He has a deep seated grief. He is not blessed with a son. He desires to seek the advice .of his preceptor, Sage Vasishtha. He entrusts the kingdom to his Ministers and sets out with his Queen, Sudakshina, to his Guru's hermitage.

The Royal chariot rolls along the country roads. The rumbling sound of the wheels attracts peacocks which raise their screaming notes. Pairs of deer gaze at the chariot from a distance. The sweet fragrance of the lotuses in the roadside ponds permeates the air. Cool and gentle breeze blows as if it fans the Royal couple. As they move on, they receive many an honour from the village folk. Priests and Brahmins shower blessings on them. Cowherds present them with fresh butter. The King and Queen evince interest in knowing the names of the forest trees. They feast their eyes on the natural scenery all round. Thus they go on to the hermitage of Sage Vasishtha.

It is then dusk. The chariot reaches the peaceful cottage of the Sage. The saints there receive Dilipa and his wife with all the royal honours.

CHAPTER II — VASISHTHA'S HERMITAGE

King Dilipa and his Queen enter Vasishtha's abode. The Sage is in his evening prayers and the royal guests wait for his beckoning. What a beatitude reigns over the place !

Rishis are just then returning from the outskirts of the forests with sacrificial twigs and fruits in their hands. Fawns wait at the cottage doors eagerly for their food. The young daughters of the hermits fill the basins under the trees with water for the birds to drink. The antelopes lie ruminating in the yards of sheds heaped with corn The whole air delights the visitors.

The Sage's rites over, Dilipa along with his Queen pays homage to his revered Guru who is seated along with his wife, Arundhati. The latter in turn shower their blessings on the royal couple.

Vasishtha makes benign enquiries of the King about the happiness and prosperity in his realm. Dilipa replies

उपपन्नं ननु शिवं सप्तस्वङ्गेषु यस्य मे ।
दैवीनां मानुषीणां च प्रतिहर्ता त्वमापदाम् ॥

"Holy Sire ! All goes well with my kingdom. Peace and plenitude reign everywhere The wise counsels of my Ministers ensure the well-being of my subjects Contentment prevails in the ranks of my army The fortresses remain, as ever, guarded closely The allies are true to their words of agreement. My State has rarely had any natural calamity. Everyone lives a full span of life Above all, your Grace is there abounding to ward off evils, both human and celestial

Yet,

किं तु वध्वां तवैतस्यामदृष्टसदृशप्रजम् ।
न मामवति सद्वीपा रत्नसूरपि मेदिनी ॥

This whole earth with all her continents and with all the precious things therein, brings no joy to me, for, Revered Sire, I have a deep-seated grief — the grief that I have not been blessed with a worthy son to continue my race. I know not the reason why.

लोकान्तरसुखं पुण्यं तपोदानसमुद्भवम् ।
संततिः शुद्धवंश्या हि परत्रेह च शर्मणे ॥
तया हीन विधातर्मां कथं पश्यन्न दूयसे ।
सिक्तं स्वयमिह स्नेहात् वन्ध्यमाश्रमवृक्षकम् ॥

True, religious merit, resulting from the performance of penance and acts of piety, produces happiness in the next world; but offspring, of pure descent, conduces to happiness in the other world as well as in this.

How is it, Oh Venerable Sage, that you are not grieved to see me destitute of the same, like a sapling of the hermitage, watered personally through affection, bearing no fruit ?*

Sire, you are aware that by the birth of a son, a father secures the offering of oblations to his ancestors and thus frees himself from the debt due to them. It behoves you, therefore, Oh father ! to do that by which I may be released from the debt. Have not the descendants of Ikshvaku lifted up their eyes to you in the past for succour in times of distress ?"

Vasishtha calmly listens to all that the King has said. He is a pastmaster in Yoga. In a moment he puts himself in

*The King wants to kindle the mercy of Vasishtha. He compares himself to a tree reared by the sage but bearing no fruit. In the fifth canto of this very work, a verse goes thus :

आधारबन्धप्रमुखैः प्रयत्नैः संवर्धितानां सुतनिर्विशेषम् ।

conveying that the Rishis tend the trees of the hermitage as their own children with all kinds of efforts.

a contemplative mood and unravels the things unknown

इति विज्ञापितो राज्ञा ध्यानस्तिमितलोचनः ।
क्षणमात्रमृषिस्तस्थौ सुप्तमीन इव ह्रदः ॥ †

Here is the picture of what he perceives in his mind's eye :

"Dilipa once visits Swarga to meet Indra. During his hurried return journey, he fails to circumambulate the Celestial cow – SURABHI – which is then reposing under the shade of the Kalpaka tree. Alas ! For this unwitting error, the cow lays a curse on him: 'Till my daughter is propitiated by you, Oh King ! you will have no progeny'. Neither the King nor the charioteer hears these woeful words as the words get drowned in the roaring noise of the heavenly Ganga".

Vasishtha then shoots an affectionate glance at the King. He spells out what he has seen through his inner eye.

प्रतिबध्नाति हि श्रेयः पूज्यपूजाव्यतिक्रमः

"Neglecting to honour those worthy of honour is sure to obstruct one's welfare."

Kalidasa gives to the world one of those subtle truths that one often experiences in life.

As Vasishtha is speaking thus, there comes the Cow Nandini, daughter of Surabhi, back from the forest. Seeing the blessed cow turn up the very moment her name is mentioned, the Sage, versed in the reading of omens, assures Dilipa of the fulfilment of his wishes in the not too distant future.

Vasishtha directs both the King and Queen to win back

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† In the verse above, we find a very fine example of how Kalidasa is meticulous in choosing appropriate words to express his similes.

Vasishtha who is the repository of harmless thoughts and actions, is compared to a lake having nothing but such harmless creatures as fish in it. Again, when one is in meditation, the functions of one's external senses are suspended. Likewise, the lake appears calm and splashless when the fish are fast asleep.

the favour of the Mother Cow by their unceasing and single-minded devotion to Nandini. He asks them both to lead the anchorite's life during this period of propitiation. The royal guests fall in heartily with the advice of their spiritual preceptor. Receiving his blessings, they retire to the ashrama assigned to them.

CHAPTER III — DILIPA ON TEST

It is early morning. Vedic chantings fill the air in Vasishtha's abode. King Dilipa and his Queen get up hearing the students' recitals. They both are ready to serve the daughter of Surabhi assiduously as enjoined by the Sage.

The milking is over and Nandini is let off for grazing in the forests. Sudakshina follows her close upon her heels with a devout mind. After going a little distance, the King sends his Queen back and he alone accompanies Nandini to the woods. Wherever she goes, he follows like her very shadow.

स्थितः स्थितामुच्चलितः प्रयातां निषेदुषीमासनबन्धधीरः ।
जलाभिलाषी जलमाददानां छायेव तां भूपतिरन्वगच्छत् ॥

Whenever the cow makes a halt, he too stops. While she moves on, he also proceeds. The moment she lies down to rest, he too sits. As she drinks water, he is also eager for it.

As he passes through the forests, the trees seem to welcome him exclaiming words of 'Victory' through the musical notes of birds perched on them. The tender creepers wafted by the wind shower on him their flowers. Cool breeze carrying sprays from the rills of adjoining mountains blows gently over him, removing his fatigue due to mid-day heat. His bodily beauty attracts the forest deer which gaze at him without fear He hears his own glory being sung by the sylvan nymphs in the bowers. The cow goes on from place to place quite unrestricted in her wanderings. The King gives her all the comforts, leaving nothing to be desired.

The sun is about to set. The shades of night begin to close upon the forest. The dark-skinned boars leave the

puddles and scatter in all directions. The peacocks with their expanded plumages make their way to their roosting trees. The antelopes swarm the grassy spots. All these, the poet says, make the forest look darker.

Nandini gets back to Vasishtha's hermitage. The Queen receives both the cow and the King at the gates. She offers due worship to the cow.

Dilipa finishes his evening rites. Along with Sudakshina, he visits his Guru to pay the daily homage. Thereafter the royal pair reach the place where Nandini is resting. They wait to go to bed till the cow has slept. Likewise, they get up in the morning before she has risen.

Thus twenty-one days roll on. On the morning of the twenty-second day, the King starts with the cow to the forest. The latter enters a cavern near the falls of the Ganga in the Himalayan dale. She grazes on the tender green grass plots there.

As she is grazing, Dilipa slackens in his attention towards the cow. He is carried away by the beauty of the mountain scenery and loses himself in the enjoyment of nature in the surroundings.

Nandini seizes this opportunity to test his devotion She throws an illusion so as not to arouse least suspicion in the King's mind.

Suddenly the King whose eyes are fixed elsewhere, hears the cow's piteous cry. As if by reins his attention is turned towards her. Alas! to his surprise, he sees a lion sitting tight over the cow, ready to make a meal of her. His thoughts run quickly to protect the cow whose care has been entrusted to him. Is he not famed as the 'Protector' of the oppressed? Now, in his very presence, the cow's life is in danger. He hastens to draw out an arrow from the quiver. What a pity! His right arm becomes magically numbed. His fingers stick fast to the feathered end of the arrow. The

King stands still quite helpless altogether. He looked lifeless as though in a painted picture !

वामेतरस्तस्य करः प्रहर्तुः नखप्रभाभूषितकंकपत्रे ।
सक्ताङ्गुलिः सायकपुङ्ख एव चित्रार्पितारम्भ इवावतस्थे ॥

What a wonderful portrait the poet has depicted here !

The King gets enraged like a serpent whose power has been checked by charms and herbs. He burns within himself as he is made powerless to punish the offender even though the latter is so near.

Then, to his amazement, the lion starts addressing him in a human voice !

अलं महीपाल तव श्रमेण प्रयुक्तमप्यस्त्रमितो वृथा स्यात् ।
न पादपोन्मूलनशक्ति रंहः शिलोच्चये मूर्च्छति मारुतस्य ॥
अवेहि मां किंकरमष्टमूर्तेः कुम्भोदरं नाम निकुम्भमित्रम् ॥
अमुं पुरः पश्यसि देवदारुं पुत्रीकृतोऽसौ वृषभध्वजेन ॥
कण्डूयमानेन कटं कदाचित् वन्यद्विपेनोन्मथिता त्वगस्य ।
अथैनमद्रेस्तनया शुशोच सेनान्यमालीढमिवासुरास्त्रैः ॥
स त्वं निवर्तस्व विहाय लज्जां गुरोर्भवान् दर्शितशिष्यभक्तिः ।
शस्त्रेण रक्ष्यं, यदशक्यरक्षं न तद्यशः शस्त्रभृतां क्षिणोति ॥

"Oh King ! Enough with your effort. Even if you were to discharge your shafts at me, they would fall in vain. Don't you know that even the most powerful gale, though capable of up-rooting trees, proves flat against a mountain ?

"I am the servant of God Shiva. Kumbhodara is my name. Nikumbha is my friend

"Oh, Lord of the earth ! See this tree in front of you It is Devadaru which is nursed by God Shiva as his own son. Once it happened thus :

"By chance an elephant came and scratched its temples against this tree and its bark was peeled off At this, Parvati's distress knew no bounds. She too felt as if it is

a harm done to her own son. Since then, I am put in charge of this cavern and I make a meal of whatever comes this way.

"Oh Dilipa ! Go back to your place. You have shown your devotion to your Guru. Your inability to save the cow will not lessen your fame, for it is the divine power that has reduced you to this helpless state."

All these words of the lion pierce the heart of the King. He realises that he has been paralysed by supernatural powers. Hence he does not get disheartened.

He is in a dilemma. He is aware that Sage Vasishtha is constantly in need of offerings supplied by the cow and consequently cannot afford to lose the cow. So he decides to offer his own body as the price of the cow's release. He appeals to the lion :

स त्वं मदीयेन शरीरवृत्तिं देहेन निर्वर्तयितुं प्रसीद ।
दिनावसानोत्सुकबालवत्सा विसृज्यतां धेनुरियं महर्षेः ॥

"Be pleased to make your subsistence on this my body, and let this cow of the great sage be liberated. Her little calf will be anxiously looking for her return at the close of the day."

But the lion tries sophistry. It tries to dissuade the King thus :

एकातपत्रं जगतः प्रभुत्वं नवं वयः कान्तमिदं वपुश्च ।
अल्पस्य हेतोः बहु हातुमिच्छन् विचारमूढः प्रतिभासि मे त्वम् ॥

भूतानुकम्पा तव चेदियं गौः एका भवेत् स्वस्तिमती त्वदन्ते ।
जीवन् पुनः शश्वदुपप्लवेभ्यः प्रजाः प्रजानाथ पितेव पासि ॥

अथैकधेनोरपराधचण्डात् गुरोः कृशानुप्रतिमाद्बिभेषि ।
शक्योऽस्य मन्युर्भवता विनेतुं गाः कोटिशः स्पर्शयता घटोध्नीः ॥

"Oh Dilipa !

"An undisputed sovereignty over the whole world, prime of youth and this handsome form — you who wish to forego all these for the sake of a trifle, seem to me but foolish in your judgement.

"If this be your compassion for living beings, this cow alone will be happy by your death. But if alive, O King ! you like a father will ever protect your subjects from calamities.

"But if you dread your spiritual guide, who having an only cow, will be burning with anger at your offence, it is possible for you to pacify his wrath by presenting him with millions of cows."

The sophistical argument of the lion has no effect on Dilipa. He sticks to his decision and begs the lion once again .

क्षतात् किल त्रायत इत्युदग्रः क्षत्रस्य शब्दो भुवनेषु रूढः ।
राज्येन किं तद्विपरीतवृत्तेः प्राणैरुपक्रोशमलीमसैर्वा ॥
कथं नु शक्योऽनुनयो महर्षे र्विश्राणनाच्चान्यपयस्विनीनाम् ।
इमामनूनां सुरभेरवेहि रुद्रौजसा तु प्रहृतं त्वयास्याम् ॥
सेयं स्वदेहार्पणनिष्क्रयेण न्याय्या मया मोचयितुं भवत्तः ।
न पारणा स्याद्विहता तवैवं भवेदलुप्तश्च मुनेः क्रियार्थः ॥
भवानपीदं परवानवैति महान् हि यत्नस्तव देवदारौ ।
स्थातुं नियोक्तुर्न हि शक्यमग्रे विनाश्य रक्ष्यं स्वयमक्षतेन ॥

"The noble name of the military caste is verily known through the various worlds as 'the one that protects from danger' ; but to one who acts in opposition to this, of what use is a kingdom or a life tarnished by infamy ?

"And how will it be possible to allay the anger of the great sage by the gift of ordinary milch cows ? Know that his cow is no way inferior to Surabhi , that you have attacked her m by virtue of the power of Rudra.

"This cow ought fairly to be liberated from you by me by giving away my body as a barter. Thus will neither you be deprived of your dinner after fast nor will the means of the rites of the sage be destroyed.

"Don't you understand that a servant cannot stand before his master, himself unhurt, after having allowed his

charge to perish? Oh lion! If you deem me not fit to be killed, be compassionate to my other body of fame."

Hearing the King's words which came from the bottom of his heart, the lion says 'Be it so.' As Dilipa presents himself before the lion to be eaten, the illusion vanishes. The holy cow grants the King his desire.

CHAPTER IV — RAGHU IS CROWNED KING

King Dilipa hastens to the hermitage alone with Nandini. The sage learns from the King all that has happened in the forest He directs Dilipa to partake of the milk of Nandini.

Vasishtha is greatly pleased with the King who has acquitted himself creditably in the cow's test and has earned her favour. Receiving the Guru's blessings, Dilipa and Sudakshina return to to the capital.

The Queen soon develops symptoms of getting a babe Dilipa is delighted at the prospect.

Women are supposed to have cravings of one kind or the other during their period of pregnancy and these are satisfied by their attending campanions See how well Kalidasa has brought out this idea in the verse —

न मे ह्रिया शंसति किंचिदीप्सितं स्पृहावती वस्तुषु केषु मागधी ।
इति स्म पृच्छत्यनुवेलमादृतः प्रियासखीरुत्तरकोसलेश्वरः ॥

Dilipa meets all her wishes. Sudakshina looks more and more graceful as the stage of her pregnancy advances.

निधानगर्भामिव सागराम्बरां शमीमिवाभ्यन्तरलीनपावकाम् ।
नदीमिवान्तस्सलिलां सरस्वतीं नृपः ससत्वां महिषीममन्यत ॥

The poet gives us a मालोपमा (chain of similes) here. The deeper one goes into these similes, the greater is the embedded meaning one finds in them. The 'epithet निधानगर्भां indicates the limitless fortune of the forthcoming babe, the शमी tree is said to contain fire and this comparison denotes the prowess of the child, while नदीमिव hints at the purity of the child to be born. The reader enjoys the बिम्बप्रतिबिम्बभाव in this verse.

In the third canto Kalidasa stresses the importance of the 'Samskaras' or ceremonies at the various stages preceding and following the birth of a babe. Ceremonies like Pumsavana (attendant on pregnancy) are performed by the King, and he eagerly awaits the birth of a child.

The auspicious moment arrives. Five planets are in their exalted position and Sudakshina brings to bed a glorious son. The quarters brighten up. Gentle breezes blow. Signs that mark the emergence of a world-benefactor appear all around.

Vasishtha who is sent for, reaches the Capital and ensures that all the due rites at the birth of a child to the King are done. Dilipa names his son Raghu.

The boy grows up. At the appropriate time, the tonsure ceremony takes place. In the company of the ministers' sons of his age, he learns the alphabets quickly. Thereafter, Raghu is invested with the sacred thread.

धियः समग्रैः सगुणैरुदारधीः क्रमाच्चतस्रः चतुरर्णवोपमाः ।
ततार विद्याः पवनातिपातिभिः दिशो हरिद्भिर्हरितामिवेश्वरः ॥

Just as the sun passes over the four quarters with the aid of his horses surpassing the wind in speed, so Raghu with his manysided intellectual faculties, gradually gets through the four departments of knowledge.

Raghu learns from his father himself the use of several missiles together with their incantations. He attains mastery in the field of archery.

Raghu grows into a full-blown youth and develops a charming personality. He surpasses his father in his physical excellence. After the prescribed ceremomy of removal of hair at the end of period of celebacy, Raghu marries many a princess.

Dilipa makes Raghu the crown prince and delegates to him some of his regal functions. A rare combination indeed they both are, and prove invincible to their foes.

Dilipa wishes to perform for the hundredth time the horse sacrifice (Aswamedha) and appoints Raghu to guard the horse

Indra gets alarmed at this. He fears that if the sacrifice were to conclude, he will be deprived of his throne.

So he steals away the horse. The prince is bewildered at the sudden disappearance of his horse But luck favours him Nandini appears there accidentally Is he himself not the gift of her ? With her aid, he sees Indra speeding up in the high skies along with the horse In a stentorian voice, he addresses Indra boldly A battle of words ensues between them (The Poet's verses are thrilling and Sanskrit lovers can hardly afford to miss them.)

मखांशभाजां प्रथमो मनीषिभिः त्वमेव देवेन्द्र सदा निगद्यसे ।
अजस्रदीक्षाप्रयतस्य मद्गुरोः क्रियाविघाताय कथं प्रवर्तसे ॥
त्रिलोकनाथेन सदा मखद्विषः त्वया नियम्या ननु दिव्यचक्षुषा ।
स चेत्स्वयं कर्मसु धर्मचारिणां त्वमन्तरायो भवसि च्युतो विधिः ॥
तदङ्गमग्र्यं मघवन् महाक्रतोः अमुं तुरंगं प्रतिमोक्तुमर्हसि ।
पथःश्रुतेः दर्शयितार ईश्वराः मलीमसामाददते न पद्धतिम् ॥

"Oh ! Lord of the Gods ! The wise count you as the foremost among the Devas who share the oblations in sacrifices. How is it then that you should yourself stoop to hinder such a sacrifice performed by my revered father?

"Should you not, with your divine vision, check those who are enemies to sacrifices ? If you yourself should choose to come in the way of doings of the righteous, works of piety must come to a stand-still !

"Oh Indra it behoves you to set my horse free Those whose duty it is to uphold the paths enjoined in the Vedas, never adopt an unrighteous course "

These bold and intelligent words of Raghu make a deep impress on Indra. The Lord of the Gods comes back to the place where the prince is standing. He replies—

यदात्थ राजन्यकुमार तत्तथा यशस्तु रक्ष्यं परतो यशोधनैः ॥

Indra agrees with Raghu in every respect. But his only complaint is that Dilipa is trying to usurp his throne. He feels that his honour which is at stake should be protected at all costs.

हरिर्यथैकः पुरुषोत्तमः स्मृतः महेश्वरः त्र्यम्बक एव नापरः ।
तथा विदुर्मां मुनयः शतक्रतुं द्वितीयगामी न हि शब्द एषः ॥

"Just as Hari (Vishnu) is known by the name पुरुषोत्तम, Tryambaka by the name महेश्वर and no one else, in the same manner sages have known me as शतक्रतु None of these words is applied to a second person."

Raghu makes a derisive smile at the charge of Indra and throws out a challenge. A fierce duel takes place between them.

Raghu cuts off the string of Indra's bow. Filled with rage, Indra strikes Raghu with his weapon. Raghu falls down for a moment but is up in his position ready to give fight again.

Indra applauds Raghu's prowess even though the prince is his foe. Virtues do make an impression everywhere (पदं हि सर्वत्र गुणैः निधीयते).

Indra, mightily pleased, accords Dilipa the entire merit of the performance of his sacrifice. He despatches his charioteer Matali to Dilipa to convey these tidings.

The King warmly receives Raghu and considers him fit to take the reins of the kingdom. He places Raghu on the throne. As is the custom of the Kings of Ikshwaku's race, he retires to the forest with his Queen to lead an anchorite's life.

CHAPTER V — RAGHU'S DIGVIJAYA

[The fourth Canto of Raghuvamsa is an important piece in the field of Sanskrit literature. Kalidasa gives therein an account of the Digvijaya of King Raghu.

The description of his tour throws some light on the geography and the manners and customs of the people during the Poet's times. Many commentators have tried to identify the places referred to in the Kavya with the modern names It is indeed quite interesting to go through their valuable commentaries.

Raghu commences his campaign from his capital Ayodhya He proceeds towards the east where he subdues the Sumhas and Vangas.' Crossing the river Kapisa, he turns towards the South. He marches triumphantly through the country of the Utkalas and wins over the Kings of the Kalingas and the Pandyas. Thereafter he crosses the Sahya mountain and subjugates the Aparantha districts along the Western coast. He then journeys towards the North along the coastal route and reaches Persia where he defeats the Parasikas. He crosses the river Sindhu and reaches the place where the Hunas and the Kambojas reside and vanquishes them in fight. Then he goes across the Himalayas and overpowers the Utsavasanketas. He brings the Chiefs of the Pragjyotishas and the Kamarupas under his sway and thence returns to his Capital.

One theory exists that Kalidasa might have written this canto on the basis of Samudragupta's travels to the South. Another theory is that the poet must have taken the material from the Puranas. The description of the various places, rivers and mountains makes however one believe that Kalidasa must have travelled widely with a keen observer's eye.]

Raghu ascends the throne. His face is radiant with regal splendour. An orb of glow is visible round him as if Goddess Lakshmi is attending upon him. The bards pour forth copious encomiums of his glory. The King looks at things not with his physical eyes but through the light thrown upon them by the Sastras. His administration of justice wins the hearts of his people just as the Southern breeze which is neither too hot nor too cold. His subjects delight in his rule.

यथा प्रह्लादनाच्चन्द्रः प्रतापात्तपनो यथा ।
तथैव सोऽभूदन्वर्थः राजा प्रकृतिरञ्जनात् ॥

The delighting Moon is rightly called Chandra (चंदयति). The Sun by its diffusing heat is correctly named Tapana (तपति) and so Raghu by pleasing his subjects is justly styled 'Raja' (रञ्जयति). He outshines his father, Dilipa, in every respect.

The hostile kings are restless. The fire of jealousy is smouldering in their hearts.

The rains are over. The autumn sets in. Brightness prevails everywhere. Raghu decides to undertake the campaign of conquest throughout India. The King's spotless fame has already reached the corners of the earth. The village girls in the paddy fields rest under the sugar-cane shade and sing in rapturous melodies Raghu's heroic deeds.

हंसश्रेणीषु तारासु कुमुद्वत्सु च वारिषु ।
विभूतयस्तदीयानां पर्यस्ता यशसामिव ॥

(Here we see one of the many charming hyperboles in which Kalidasa revels).

Fame is described by Sanskrit poets as white. The swans, the bright shining stars and the lotus-abounding waters which mark the advent of autumn, the poet says, have derived their whiteness from Raghu's spotless fame!

The autumn season holds out to Raghu all facilities for his campaign The bulls, the beasts of burden, are now in high spirits. The war elephants are in their rut and are eminently suited for fighting.

The water in the rivers gradually subsides and the rivers become fordable. The mires get dried up affording easy passage to Raghu's troops.

The King takes adequate measures to guard his city and the frontier forts He ensures that no attack on his Capital is possible in his absence. He gathers around him his personal six-fold force for the conquest of the quarters. (The King's six kinds of soldiers are · Maula, Bhrityas, Suhrt, Shreni, Dwishad and Atavikas).

Raghu sets out on his expedition and starts first towards the east He has immense resources at his command. The very news of the King's approach strikes terror in his enemies' hearts. Invincible as he is with his mighty army, he subdues the ordinary kings and uproots those that dare to defy him. Without suffering any defeat, he reaches the shores of the eastern ocean, dark on account of the dense forests of palms.

अनम्राणा समुद्धर्तुः तस्मात् सिन्धुरयादिव ।
आत्मा संरक्षितः सुह्मैः वृत्तिमाश्रित्य वैतसीम् ॥†

Raghu meets the Sumha Kings They offer no resistance and save themselves by adopting the policy of submission

वङ्गानुत्खाय तरसा नेता नौसाधनोद्यतान् ।
निचखान जयस्तम्भान् गङ्गास्रोतोन्तरेषु सः ॥

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† This simile is indeed striking The Sumhas lived in a country abounding in cane-plants which grow along the banks of the Ganga Every day they had an opportunity to see how big trees resisting the force of the current were borne down by the river while the supple cane was spared, and to learn thereby the safest course of action in case of an invasion by a more powerful enemy — *From notes by Prof. Kale*

Then Raghu vanquishes the Vanga chiefs (in East Bengal) who put up a resistance with their fleets. To mark his victory, the King erects pillars on the deltas of the streams of the Gaṅga. The princes so defeated are however placed back on their thrones by Raghu. Struck by his magnanimity and overcome by his gratitude, they honour him with presents.

स तीर्त्वा कपिशां सैन्यैः बद्धद्विरदसेतुभिः ।
उत्कलादर्शितपथः कलिङ्गाभिमुखो ययौ ॥

Crossing the Kapisa river (the modern Cossya) by means of bridges formed of elephants, Raghu enters Utkala (Orissa). The Utkalas surrender to Raghu easily and assist him in his passage towards Kalinga, the Southern part of Orissa extending to the mouths of the Godavari.

On his way to Kalinga, Raghu establishes his authority over the Mahendra mountain. The King of Kalinga faces Raghu with his army of elephants. Raghu, however, achieves a resounding victory over him.

ताम्बूलीनां दलैः तत्र रचितापानभूमयः ।
नारिकेलासवं योधाः शात्रवं च पपुर्यशः ॥

Raghu's soldiers set up drinking stalls there and not only do they drink the coconut-wine in cups of betel leaves but quaff the glory of the enemy too! Raghu shows himself to be a धर्मविजयी (a righteous conqueror who takes the wealth of a conquered king but restores him to his throne). Then, along the sea coast lined with areca-trees, laden with fruits, Raghu marches on towards the South.

स सैन्यपरिभोगेण गजदानसुगन्धिना ।
कावेरीं सरितां पत्युः शङ्कनीयामिवाकरोत् ॥

The King approaches the place where the river Kaveri flows. His army enjoys a cool bath in the river and its water bears the scent of the rut of the elephants. (The rivers are poetically described as the wives of the sea and as such must

be faithful to the sea. But here Kaveri bears marks of her sporting with others and so, makes the sea, as it were, suspicious of her fidelity !)

Thereafter Raghu encamps on the adjoining grounds of the Malaya mountain (the Southern part of the Western Ghats) which abounds in pepper creepers. The mountain is famous for its cool breezes and the place acts as a pleasant rest house for the jaded army.

After resting for a while in the Mount Malaya (मलय) which abounds in cardamom plants also, Raghu's army proceeds towards the extreme south. As it marches on, the particles of cardamom seeds, powdered by the hoofs of the horses, fly about and settle on the temples of the elephants

Raghu reaches the Pandya kingdom through which flows the river Tamraparni. The princes there face Raghu but are unable to withstand his prowess. They prostrate before their Victor and present to him the most precious pearls gathered from the place where Tamraparni joins the sea.

तस्यामेव रघोः पाण्ड्याः प्रतापं न विषेहिरे ॥
ताम्रपर्णीसमेतस्य मुक्तासारं महोदधेः ।
ते निपत्य ददुस्तस्मै यशः स्वमिव सञ्चितम् ॥

As they are presenting the pearls, it looks, the poet describes, as though the Pandyan princes are handing over to Raghu their hoarded fame too !

Raghu enjoys his stay for some days in the mountain chains of Malaya and Dardura (which form the eastern boundary of Travancore) which are rich in sandal-wood trees. Thereafter he crosses the Sahyadri, a peak in the Western Ghats near Nilgiris, and reaches the Kerala country.

भयोत्सृष्टविभूषाणां तेन केरलयोषिताम् ।
अलकेषु चमूरेणुः चूर्णप्रतिनिधीकृतः ॥

As he approaches, the fear-struck Kerala ladies give up

all their personal decoration. The dust raised by the army during its march acts as a substitute for hair-powder on their curling ringlets !

Cool breeze blows from the river Murala and the pollens of the fragrant Ketaka flowers serve as a natural scent powder to the armours of Raghu's soldiers.

तस्यानीकैः विसर्पद्भिः अपरान्तजयोद्यतैः ।
रामास्त्रोत्सारितोऽप्यासीत् सह्यलग्न इवार्णवः ॥

"Though the Arabian Sea had been repulsed by Parasurama's enchanted weapon long way off from the Sahya mountain, Raghu's army marching for the conquest of the Western regions, made it appear as if the sea was near the Sahya mountain."*

King Raghu turns towards the Northern direction and journeys along the Western coast. He lands on the Mount Trikuta (a mountain of three peaks) with his army. Raghu's elephants sport on the slopes of the peak and make deep cuts on it by their tusks. Trikuta with these permanent marks looks as a pillar of victory.

The Kings of the western territories (Aparantas—the Konkan, Kanara and Bombay districts) are defeated by Raghu. They present to him many valuable oceanfinds.

अवकाशं किलोदन्वान् रामायाभ्यर्थितो ददौ ।
अपरान्तमहीपालव्याजेन रघवे करम् ॥

*Once Parasurama destroys the Kshatriya race twenty-one times and takes possession of the whole earth He performs a sacrifice in which he makes a gift of it to Sage Kasyapa as *dakshina*. Parasurama is rendered homeless. Kasyapa asks him to seek space for himself from the sea. The ocean tells him to raise land by removing its waters if he could. Standing at the top of the Sahya mountain, Parasurama throws an arrow into the sea with the result that its waters recede to the arrow point, from the vicinity of the Sahya. So the strip of land between the sea and the mountain is known as Parasurama Kshetram.

Once the ocean gave space to Parasurama on being requested by him ; but it now gives tribute to Raghu under the disguise of the Western Kings.

Raghu then sets out by the land route to conquer the Persian princes (पारसीकान् ततो जेतुं प्रतस्थे स्थलवर्त्मना). The invasion of Raghu strikes terror into the hearts of the Persian ladies who are addicted to drink. A gloom is cast over their cheerful faces. A fierce fight takes place between Raghu and the Western Kings who face him with their powerful cavalry. The Lord of Kosalas cuts off their heads with his sharp arrows and strews them over the battlefield. The survivors however take off their helmets and surrender to Raghu.

अपनीतशिरस्त्राणाः शेषास्तं शरणं ययुः ॥

The wrath of the noble-minded persons against their enemies is quenched by prostration.

प्रणिपातप्रतीकारः संरम्भो हि महात्मनाम् ॥

The soldiers of Raghu have their fill of wine and thus they remove their fatigue caused by the battle.

Raghu moves on to the Indus regions. His horses refresh themselves by rolling on the river banks. After conquering the Huna warriors there, Raghu proceeds to the territory of the Kambojas (the adjoining sites of Kabul)

काम्बोजाः समरे सोढुं तस्य वीर्यमनीश्वराः ॥
तेषां सदश्वभूयिष्ठास्तुङ्गा द्रविणराशयः ।
उपदा विविशुः शश्वन्नोत्सेकाः कोसलेश्वरम् ॥

The Kambojas are unable to fight with Raghu in battle and bow down to him. Noble steeds and heaps of riches are among their many tributes to Raghu.

With his cavalry, Raghu ascends the Himalayan mountains. The lions gaze from their caves without fear at the passing army. Cool breezes carrying sprays of the Ganga

please the tired army. The soldiers rest on the stone-slabs fragrant with musk of the deer.

सरलासक्तमातंगग्रैवेयस्फुरितत्विषः ।
आसन्नोपधयो नेतुः नक्तमस्नेहदीपिकाः ॥

"The phosphorescent herbs whose light was reflected by the neck-chains of the elephants tied to the pine-trees served Raghu as flamebeaus without oil during night."

शरैरुत्सवसंकेतान् स कृत्वा विरतोत्सवान् ।
जयोदाहरणं बाह्वोः गापयामास किन्नरान् ॥

A fierce encounter takes place between Raghu and the Utsavasanketas (hill tribes in Ladak and the other parts to the north of Kashmir). Fire flashes forth by the striking against each other of the iron-darts and the stones hurled by means of slings. The tribes are however no match for Raghu, who vanquishes them in fight with his arrows and renders them spiritless. The Kinnaras there sing forth Raghu's glories.

Having established his imperishable fame in the Himalayan ranges, Raghu comes down to Mount Kailasa. He crosses the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) and re-enters India through the North Eastern frontier. He reaches the provinces of Pragjyotisha (Eastern Assam) and Kamarupa (Western Bhootan and Assam). Raghu triumphs over the chiefs of these States and receives enormous tributes from them. The conqueror then returns to his capital.

On the successful completion of his Digvijaya, Raghu performs a Viswajit sacrifice in which he gives away all his wealth as *dakshina*.

CHAPTER VI — AJA IS BORN

King Raghu has invited the conquered princes to his Viswajit sacrifice. He bestows all his riches on the needy and deserving ones present on the occasion. The sacrifice is over. The princes take leave of Raghu and depart for their Capitals. The Lord of Ayodhya shines forth as "Universal Emperor."

When Raghu has thus exhausted his treasury to the last pie, there comes to him a Brahmin, Kautsa by name, the disciple of Sage Varatantu. He has a wish in his heart. The monarch receives his revered guest with all the honours and makes benevolent enquiries of the well-being of the Maharshi as well as of things connected with the latter's hermitage. He then asks Kautsa the purpose of his visit.

Kautsa casts a look around. He notes that the King himself is holding an earthen vessel in his hand and is receiving his guests. Not a single object made of gold is visible in the palace. Kautsa feels depressed. He doubts the success of his visit. He addresses Raghu :

सर्वत्र नो वार्तमवेहि राजन् नाथे कुतस्त्वय्यशुभं प्रजानाम् ।
सूर्ये तपत्यावरणाय दृष्टेः कल्पेत लोकस्य कथं तमिस्रा ॥

भक्तिः प्रतीक्ष्येषु कुलोचिता ते पूर्वान् महाभाग तयातिशेषे ।
व्यतीतकालस्त्वहमभ्युपेतः त्वामर्थिभावादिति मे विषादः ॥

Oh King ! All is well with us Woe can hardly betide your subjects when you are their protector. While the Sun shines, how can even pitch of darkness obstruct the sight of men ?

Oh Glorious One! . Reverence to those worthy of honour is a trait of your family. You surpass your ancestors in this regard. But it seems to me that I have come to you as a suppliant in an inopportune moment. Hence my regret.

You are indeed a paramount King. But you now exhibit a condition of destitution as a result of the sacrifice. My sole object of coming here is to secure fourteen crores of money (gold coins) from you to give to my master as Gurudakshina. However seeing you in this condition, I am afraid I shall have to achieve my object elsewhere. May you live long!

So saying, Kautsa tries to depart. But Raghu stops him and says:

(What a sweetness flows from Kalidasa's verses here!)

गुर्वर्थमर्थी श्रुतपारदृश्वा रघोः सकाशादनवाप्य कामम् ।
गतो वदान्यान्तरमित्ययं मे माभूत्परीवादनवावतारः ॥

स त्वं प्रशस्ते महिते मदीये वसन् चतुर्थोऽग्निरिवाग्न्यगारे ।
द्वित्राण्यहान्यर्हसि सोढुमर्हन् यावद्यते साधयितु त्वदर्थम् ॥

"A certain solicitor, who was well-versed in Vedic lore and who asked money for his preceptor, on failing to obtain his object from Raghu, went to another donor; let not the clapping of this stigma for the first time be on my name.

"Oh venerable one! be pleased therefore to sojourn as the fourth fire for three or four days in my well-known and adorable sanctuary of fires; during which period I shall endeavour to fulfil your wish."

These words of Raghu delight Kautsa. The King decides to wrench money from Kubera, the Lord of Wealth.

The next morning, Raghu prepares a march against Kubera. As he is about to start, his treasury officers witness, to their amazement, showers of gold from the sky in the

treasury vaults! They hasten to the King to report the incident.*

Raghu asks Kautsa to take the whole of that glittering heap of gold granted by Kubera.

जनस्य साकेतनिवासिनस्तौ द्वावप्यभूतामभिनन्द्यसत्त्वौ ।
गुरुप्रदेयाधिकनिःस्पृहोऽर्थी नृपोऽर्थिकामादधिकप्रदश्च ॥

There arises an amusing dispute between the two — the solicitor (Kautsa) and the King (Raghu) — the former refusing to take more than what is wanted to reward his Guru, and the latter giving the former more than what is requested. The two show a determination which is applauded by the citizens of Ayodhya.

The delighted guest pronounces his benediction on the King:

पुत्रं लभस्वात्मगुणानुरूपं भवन्तमीड्यं भवतः पितेव ॥

"May you obtain a son worthy of your excellences just as your father obtained your praiseworthy self!" Then, taking the required sum, Kautsa repairs to his Guru's abode.

The blessing of Kautsa on the King has its effect soon. Raghu's Queen gives birth to a son on one early morning (ब्राह्ममुहूर्ते) the hour propitious to Brahma, the Creator. Hence the father names his son AJA (one of the names of the Creator).

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*It is interesting to read Prof Kale's comments on the poet's verse here: Raghu considers Kubera to be no better than a tributary prince and therefore easy to be conquered. Raghu was the conqueror of Indra, the strongest of the LOKAPALAS and therefore more than a match for Kubera, an ordinary Lokapala. Again, the poet ingeniously extricates Raghu from the difficulty he was in. It would not have looked decent to make a LOKAPALA like Kubera bend before a mortal like Raghu nor to bring back his hero unsuccessful from his expedition. He therefore devises a third alternative which makes his hero achieve his object and spares Kubera from the humiliation of a defeat at the hands of the mortal king.]

Aja is verily the chip of the old block. His resplendent form, his powers and his inborn sublimity are all the same as his father Raghu's.

रूपं तदोजस्वि तदेव वीर्यं तदेव नैसर्गिकमुन्नतत्वम् ॥

Aja acquires proficiency in all branches of science. He enters youth and attains the marriageable age.

Meantime, the King Bhoja of Vidarbha, announces the Swayamvara* of his sister, Indumati. He invites Prince Aja too to the wedding.

Receiving his father's blessings, Aja proceeds from Ayodhya to the Capital of Vidarbha. As he journeys on, the villagers on the way greet him with the royal honours.

On the banks of Narmada, Aja encamps his fatigued army. Suddenly a wild elephant emerges from the water of the river and attacks the party. The Prince wounds the beast gently with an arrow. The moment it is hit, the elephant strangely enough assumes a lovely form of a Gandharva. He introduces himself as Priyamvada and says to Aja that he has been an elephant all the while due to a curse inflicted on him by Sage Matanga. Overwhelmed with joy, he presents to the Prince a hypnotic weapon.

संमोहनं नाम सखे ममास्त्रं प्रयोगसंहारविभक्तमन्त्रम् ।
गान्धर्वमादत्स्व यतः प्रयोक्तुः न चारिहिंसा विजयश्च हस्ते ॥

"Accept, friend! this missile of mine, Sammohana by name, which has a Gandharva for its presiding deity and has separate incantations for its discharge and withdrawal—a

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**Swayamvara* :*

'A girl of the warrior caste has the privilege of choosing her husband. The procedure is: All the eligible youths in the land are invited in her house and are lavishly entertained. On the appointed day, they assemble in a hall of the palace, and the maiden enters with a garland in her hand. The suitors are presented to her with some account of their claims for her attention, after which she throws the garland around the neck of him whom she chooses.'

weapon by virtue of which the person discharging it has victory sure in his hand and yet has not to kill his enemy."

Receiving the Astra gladly from Priyamvada, Aja continues his march.

The Lord of Vidarbha is filled with ecstatic joy. He extends a cordial welcome to the Prince. Aja stays in a new palace for the night. The day dawns. Young bards awaken the son of Raghu with their panegyric songs.

The prince gets up and dressed in suitable attire goes to the hall where the wedding of Indumati is to take place.

CHAPTER VII — INDUMATI CHOOSES AJA

The wedding hall scintillates with gorgeous decorations. Lovely garlands hang all round. Dressed in splendid costumes, Kings from far and near gather in the hall to participate in the Swayamvara. They take seats on the gem-set thrones provided for them on the raised dais.

As Aja arrives, the King of Vidarbha hails him and proffers a seat to him on the dais. The Prince of Ayodhya excels in splendour. The very sight of his engenders a spirit of diffidence in the hearts of other suitors in winning over Indumati. Aja becomes the cynosure of all the citizens assembled there to witness the wedding.

Princess Indumati, attired in wedding robe, enters the hall in a palanquin. She is accompanied by Sunanda, the portress, who is familiar with the personal histories of the Kings seated on the dais.

तस्मिन् विधानातिशये विधातुः कन्यामये नेत्रशतैकलक्ष्ये ।
निपेतुरन्तःकरणैः नरेन्द्राः देहैः स्थिताः केवलमासनेषु ॥

"For when they saw God's masterpiece, the maid
Who smote their eyes to other objects blind,
Their glances, wishes, hearts, in homage paid,
Flew forth to her; mere flesh remained behind."

The Kings on the dais, carried away by her bewitching beauty, betray their emotions. Various are their amatory gestures.

[The poet describes here picturesquely the different amatory feelings of the suitors in their agitated frame of mind when they see the Princess

in flesh before them. Kalidasa's verses give an excellent reading]

Sunanda conducts Indumati from one suitor to another. Eloquently does she give a detailed account of each King to the Princess. First they come to the Ruler of Magadha.

असौ शरण्यः शरणोन्मुखानां अगाधसत्त्वो मगधप्रतिष्ठः ।
राजा प्रजारञ्जनलब्धवर्णः परंतपो नाम यथार्थनामा ॥

Here is the King Parantapa, truly named. He is the refuge of all the persons that seek his protection and is the terror to all his foes.

काम नृपाः सन्तु सहस्रशोऽन्ये राजन्वतीमाहुरनेन भूमिम् ।
नक्षत्रताराग्रहसंकुलापि ज्योतिष्मती चन्द्रमसैव रात्रिः ॥

Let there be thousands of other Kings. But the earth is said to have found a pious ruler in this King, Parantapa. The night is indeed crowded with stars, planets and constellations. But it is only by moon that it has brightness.

Parantapa however does not impress the Princess Sunanda then takes Indumati to the Ruler of Angas.

जगाद चैनामयमङ्गनाथः सुराङ्गनाप्रार्थितयौवनश्रीः ।
विनीतनागः किल सूत्रकारैः ऐन्द्रं पद भूमिगतोऽपि भुङ्क्ते ॥

निसर्गभिन्नास्पदमेकसस्थं अस्मिन् द्वयं श्रीश्च सरस्वती च ।
कान्त्या गिरा सूनृतया च योग्या त्वमेव कल्याणि तयोस्तृतीया ॥

This is the Lord of the Angas. His youthful beauty has attracted even the damsels of heaven. His elephants have been trained by the authors of texts on 'Elephants'. While a denizen of earth, he enjoys a position like that of celestial Indra.

The Goddess of Wealth and the Goddess of Learning by nature reside in different places. Still the two have one and the same abode in this King. Oh Indumati ! you are quite eligible to be his bride because of your sublime loveliness and elegance in speech.

Him the Princess rejects too — 'Not that he was unworthy of love or she lacking in discernment but tastes differ.' (नासौ न काम्यो न च वेद सम्यक् द्रष्टुं न सा भिन्नरुचिर्हि लोकः)

Sunanda leads then Indumati to the King of Avanti.

अनेन यूना सह पार्थिवेन रम्भोरु कच्चिन्मनसो रुचिस्ते ।
सिप्रातरङ्गानिलकम्पितासु विहर्तुमुद्यानपरम्परासु ॥

"And if this youthful prince your fancy pleases,
Bewitching maiden, you and he may play
In those unmeasured gardens that the breezes
From Sipra's billows ruffle, cool with spray."

Yet, the Lord of Avanti fails in her estimation

The Princess is next introduced to the King Pratipa of Anupa country. What a, pity ! He also meets the same fate of the Avanti ruler.

The sister of the Vidarbha King stands now in front of King Sushena, the illustrious monarch of Surasena (Mathura).

संभाव्य भर्तारममुं युवानं मृदुप्रवालोत्तरपुष्पशय्ये ।
वृन्दावने चैत्ररथादनूने निर्विश्यतां सुन्दरि यौवनश्रीः ॥

Oh Fair Princess, honour this youthful Prince by accepting him as your husband. Enjoy the pleasures of youth on the flower-beds covered with tender sprouts in the garden of Vrindavana which is in no way inferior to Chaitraratha, the garden of Kubera.

Indumati is not fascinated by him also and passes on to the next suitor, Hemangada, the ruler of Kallinga.

यमात्मनः सद्मनि संनिकृष्टो मन्द्रध्वनित्याजितयामतूर्यः ।
प्रासादवातायनदृश्यवीचिः प्रबोधयत्यर्णव एव सुप्तम् ॥

"His palace overlooks the ocean dark
With windows gazing on the unresting deep,
Whose gentle thunders drown the drums that mark
The hours of night, and wake him from his sleep."

The deep murmurs of the sea, audibly heard in the stillness of the later part of the night render the morning trumpets unnecessary.

अनेन सार्धं विहराम्बुराशेस्तीरेषु तालीवनमर्मरेषु ।
द्वीपान्तरानीतलवङ्गपुष्पैः अपाकृतस्वेदलवा मरुद्भिः ॥

Oh Princess, sport with him on the shores of the sea full of rumbling whispers of the palm groves. The beads of perspiration from your body will be swabbed by the cool breezes waving clove flowers from the other islands.

Indumati is not taken in by the covetous narration by Sunanda. She turns away from the Kalinga King as the Goddess of Wealth does from an unlucky person

The Princess then proceeds to the monarch of the Pandya Kingdom. Sunanda pours forth colossal praises on his prowess and qualities. Alas ! the descriptions do not tempt the Princess.

Indumati now nears Aja. An emotional disturbance is distinctly visible in him because of fear that he too might fail to fascinate her and win her hand. But his right arm throbs portending auspicious good to him. He sobers himself

Sunanda gives a thrilling account of Aja's lineage as well as the prowess and fame of his illustrious father, Raghu.

Raghu now rules over his dominions. He once performed the great sacrifice 'Viswajit' and reduced himself to blissful penury by giving away all the amassed wealth to the poor. Only earthen pots remained with him.

His fame has reached the heights of the mountains ; has spread over the seas ; has entered the abode of serpents (Patala) ; and has also gone high up. It is continually pervading beyond the scope of measurement.

This heir apparent, Aja, is born to him as Jayanta was born to Indra. Though a stripling youth, this Prince discharges the onerous responsibility with studied skill and

maturity of understanding and mellowness of judgement like his father.

कुलेन कान्त्या वयसा नवेन गुणैश्च तैस्तैः विनयप्रधानैः ।
त्वमात्मनः तुल्यममुं वृणीष्व रत्नं समागच्छतु काञ्चनेन ॥

"High lineage is his, fresh beauty, youth,
And virtue shaped in kingly breeding's mould ;
Choose him, for he is worth your love ; in truth,
A gem is ever fitly set in gold."

These words of Sunanda leave a deep impress on the Princess. Out of modesty, Indumati stands speechless for a moment and casts an acquiescing look on the son of Raghu. She accepts him as a suitable match to her and garlands him.

The assembled citizens acclaim Indumati's choice. The rejected Kings are sore at heart but the retinues of Aja are immersed in joy.

(The versified translations are Ryder's.)

CHAPTER VIII — AJA ASCENDS THE THRONE

King Bhoja of Vidarbha is delighted at his sister's choice. He is happy that Indumati is to be the spouse of a worthy Prince. The slighted kings retire to their camps reproaching their dress and personal beauty which have failed to attract the Princess.

Along with Aja and Indumati, Bhoja leaves for his festive city on an elephant. The royal path leading to the palace is decked with befitting decorations. Triumphal arches adorn the highway. Flags are hoisted on the tops of the buildings in honour of Aja. The ladies in the mansions on either side rush to the windows to have a glimpse of the choice of their Princess. (Kalidasa portrays here in a colourful manner the actions of the ladies as they hurry to reach the windows. Exactly very same verses appear in his Kumarasambhava—Canto VII)

Citizens gather in large numbers to witness the royal procession. The women greet the royal pair with many a pleasing word. On arrival at the palace, Aja alights from the elephant. Bhoja offers to Aja the customary मधुपर्कं (a mixture of honey, curdled milk, clarified butter, sugar and water), and two silken garments. All proceed to the place where the marriage ceremony is to take place. According to religious rites, Aja weds Indumati

तौ स्नातकैः बन्धुमता च राज्ञा पुरंध्रिभिश्च क्रमशः प्रयुक्तम् ।
कन्याकुमारौ कनकासनस्थौ आर्द्राक्षतारोपणमन्वभूताम् ॥

The new bride and the Princess are seated on a golden throne. Moistened Akshata rice are applied to their foreheads

by the holy Brahmins, by the King with his kinsmen and by matronly ladies in succession.

Bhoja honours the disappointed kings too. Though grieved at heart, they show signs of joy outwardly and bid good-bye to the Lord of Vidarbha.

प्रमन्यवः प्रागपि कोसलेन्द्रे प्रत्येकमात्तस्वतया बभूवुः ।
अतो नृपाश्चक्षमिरे समेताः स्त्रीरत्नलाभं न तदात्मजस्य ॥

Once these kings have been deprived of their possessions by Raghu in the course of his Digvijaya due to which they are enraged against him. Now the acquisition of Indumati by his son has added to their distress. All of them therefore conspire and make a joint plan to waylay Aja during his return journey.

Aja leaves for Ayodhya along with his newly wedded wife. King Bhoja escorts them for three days and returns to his capital. The conspiring princes seize this opportunity and attack Aja's party. Aja entrusts Indumati to the care of his father's minister who is assisted by a large number of troops. A fierce battle ensues.

पत्तिः पदातिं रथिनं रथेशस्तुरङ्गसादी तुरगाधिरूढम् ।
यन्ता गजस्याभ्यपतद्गजस्थं तुल्यप्रतिद्वन्द्वि बभूव युद्धम् ॥

In the combat, the opponents are evenly matched. A foot-soldier faces another foot-soldier; a chariot-warrior challenges another charioteer; a horseman fights another horseman while an elephant-rider attacks his equal mounted on an elephant. There is all round confusion and clamour amongst the warriors. Dense columns of dust cloud the air. The four divisions in the army—the infantry, the cavalry and warriors in chariots and on elephants—fight with maddening fury. The battlefield is strewn with heads of dead soldiers.

[Kalidasa pen-pictures here remarkably the doctrine that when whosoever dies in a fight in the battle-field is taken by the gods in aerial car direct to heaven, he is sought by the nymphs there.]

कश्चित् द्विषत्खड्गहृतोत्तमाङ्गः सद्यो विमानप्रभुतामुपेत्य ।
वामाङ्गसंसक्तसुराङ्गनः स्वं नृत्यत्कबन्धं समरे ददर्श ॥

"A certain warrior having his head cut off by his adversary's sword instantly became the master of a celestial car, and with a heavenly nymph clung to his left side, beheld his own headless trunk dancing about on the battle-field."

परस्परेण क्षतयोः प्रहर्त्रोः उत्क्रान्तवाय्वोः समकालमेव ।
अमर्त्यभावेऽपि कयोश्चिदासीत् एकाप्सरःप्रार्थितयोः विवादः ॥

Two heroes, struck by each other, fall dead simultaneously and even in their divine condition, they maintain their quarrel, both being courted by the same heavenly nymph. (The commentators explain the meaning thus : The same damsel awaits the arrival of the foremost warrior. As both reach heaven simultaneously, the girl is at a loss to know whom to welcome, and hesitates. Each warrior in his turn asserts that she has come for him and thus the quarrel is kept up.)

The Battle continues. Aja puts up a terrific fight with his foes. Suddenly he employs on the enemy-forces the Sammohana astra which he has once secured from the Gandharva Priyamvada. Alas ! in a moment, Aja's foes are all overpowered by sleep. They all stand motionless. Aja blows his conch and his soldiers are delighted to see him emerging victorious from the midst of his foes.

स शोणितैस्तेन शिलीमुखाग्रैः निक्षेपिताः केतुषु पार्थिवानाम् ।
यशो हृतं संप्रति राघवेण न जीवितं वः कृपयेति वर्णाः ॥

He caused to be inscribed on the banners of the princes by means of the blood-smeared tips of arrows, the words — 'Your glory has now been taken away by the son of Raghu but not your lives through mercy.'

Indumati rejoices at her husband's valour. They both reach Ayodhya where *they are welcomed* by Raghu *joyfully*. The father considers Aja fit to take the reins of the kingdom. On an auspicious day, Aja ascends the throne.

रघुमेव निवृत्तयौवनं तममन्यन्त नवेश्वरं प्रजाः ।
स हि तस्य न केवलां श्रियं प्रतिपेदे सकलान्गुणानपि ॥

Aja not only inherits from his father his regal fortune but his personal virtues too. So the people look upon the new sovereign as Raghu himself restored to youth.

अधिकं शुशुभे शुभंयुना द्वितयेन द्वयमेव संगतम् ।
पदमृद्धमजेन पैतृकं विनयेनास्य नवं च यौवनम् ॥

"Only two things being united with a pair of auspicious ones looked peculiarly charming, viz. the prosperous ancestral kingdom by its passing to Aja, and his youthful age with his modest conduct."

Aja endears himself so much to his subjects that every one of them thinks that he is the King's favourite

अहमेव मतो महीपतेरिति सर्वः प्रकृतिष्वचिन्तयत् ॥

Aja is neither too stern nor yet too mild. Like a true statesman, he adopts the middle course. He makes the kings bend before him without dethroning them.

Seeing his son firmly established on the throne, Raghu sets about to retire to the forest to lead an anchorite's life as is the custom of his race. But Aja prostrates and appeals to his father to remain with him. Raghu grants his request and repairs to a hermitage outside the city.

CHAPTER IX — AJA'S LAMENT

The glorious era of Aja's benevolent rule commences. By his strength, the King allays the fears of the distressed beings. His deep education manifests an inborn respect towards the holy and the learned. He pleases his subjects in every way.

He seeks the counsel of his ministers in winning over the unsubdued foes. As a shrewd statesman, he employs the expedients pronounced in kingly politics with due regard to their results.

Raghu, out of his affection for his son, continues to live in secluded retirement in the hermitage outside the city. He spends his time in penance and meditation.

[Kalidasa gives here in a mellifluous style a striking comparison between the father and the son in their respective ascetic and royal forms.]

After a few years, Raghu casts off his mortal coil and joins the Supreme being.

His funeral takes place and the grief-stricken Aja duly performs his father's obsequies according to the ascetic-rites

As years roll by, Aja shines as an undisputed monarch. He performs many a sacrifice. Both the King and the Queen enjoy all happiness in life. In ccurse of time, Indumati begets a son who is named Dasaratha.

दशरश्मिशतोपमद्युतिं यशसा दिक्षु दशस्वपि श्रुतम् ।
दशपूर्वरथं यमाख्यया दशकण्ठारिगुरुं विदुर्बुधाः ॥

[The alliteration in this verse attracts the reader. Dasakantha is Ravana; his enemy is Rama and his

father is Dasaratha who is the son of Indumati. Seldom occurs a reference like this in a Kavya where a future event is precited.]

ऋषिदेवगणस्वधाभुजां श्रुतयागप्रसवैः स पार्थिवः ।
अनृणत्वमुपेयिवान् बभौ....................

Aja overcomes the three mortal obligations—to the sages, to the gods and to the manes. By Vedic studies, he has already absolved himself of the debt towards tha sages; by performing sacrifices he is free from the debt towards the gods. Now, the birth of a son has finally freed him from the debt to his forefathers.

As it happens, once Aja is sporting with his Queen in the pleasure-garden. Narada, the divine sage, is then heading across the sky towards the holy spot—GOKARNA—on the shores of the Southern ocean. As he passes just above the royal couple, a violent breeze snatches off the fragrant garland hanging on his veena. As ill-luck would have it, the garland falls on the Queen. Alas ! in an instant, Indumati drops down dead on the ground.

Aja swoons. The servants raise their woeful cries. They fan the royal pair. While the King gets back to senses, Indumati remains in her lifeless state.

प्रतिकारविधानमायुषः सति शेषे हि फलाय कल्पते ॥

A remedy is effective only where there is any remnant of life. But Indumati is no more.

Aja places his wife on his lap and in accents choked by tears, he laments.*

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*The twenty-six verses here have earned a great name for Kalidasa. The sentiment of 'pathos' is highlighted by the poet in a thrilling and hair-splitting manner. He himself suggests it in the word करुणार्थग्रथितं. There is no doubt that Kalidasa excels all other poets in portraying this picture of distress. A few stanzas quoted below will illustrate the poet's genius.]

That a garland of flowers kills a person amazes Aja. Hence he says :

कुसुमान्यपि गात्रसंगमात् प्रभवन्त्यायुरपोहितुं यदि ।
न भविष्यति हन्त साधनं किमिवान्यत् प्रहरिष्यतो विधेः ॥

If even soft flowers can cut short life by a mere contact with the body, what else cannot be the weapon of Fate wishing to strike ?

अथवा मृदु वस्तु हिंसितुं मृदुनैवारभते प्रजान्तकः ।
हिमसेकविपत्तिरत्र मे नलिनी पूर्वनिदर्शनं मता ॥

The God of Death undertakes to destroy tender things by tender things alone. In this, the lotus plant blasted by frost is looked upon by me as the first illustration. Your death is a tragic second

Aja places the wreath on his chest and tries the effect of it ; it does not kill him. So he says :

विषमप्यमृतं क्वचित् भवेत् अमृतं वा विषमीश्वरेच्छया ॥

By the will of the Almighty, even poison sometimes becomes nectar and nectar becomes poison.

कलमन्यभृतासु भाषितं कलहंसीषु मदालसं गतम् ।
पृषतीषु विलोलमीक्षितं पवनाधूतलतासु विभ्रमाः ॥

त्रिदिवोत्सुकयाप्यवेक्ष्य मां निहिताः सत्यममी गुणास्त्वया ।
विरहे तव मे गुरुव्यथं हृदयं न त्ववलम्बितुं क्षमाः ॥

Yes. True it is that as you were going to heaven, you kept here out of regard for me, your sweet voice in the nightingales, your idly graceful gait in the female swans, your lively glances in the deer and your amorous sports in the creepers shaken by the wind. But all these do not cheer me up as my heart is excessively grieved at your separation.

गृहिणी सचिवः सखी मिथः प्रियशिष्या ललिते कलाविधौ ।
करुणाविमुखेन मृत्युना हरता त्वां वद किं न मे हृतम् ॥

You were my wife, my counsellor, my beloved companion in private, my favourite pupil in the charming arts ; tell me, what I am not deprived of by the ruthless God of Death in snatching you away from me.

विभवेऽपि सति त्वया विना सुखमेतावदजस्य गण्यताम् ।
अहृतस्य विलोभनान्तरैः मम सर्वे विषयास्त्वदाश्रयाः ॥

"Still am I king, and rich in kingly fashion,
Yet lacking you, am poor the long years through;
I cannot now be won to any passion,
For all my passions centred, dear, in you."

Thus, in a pathetic strain, does Aja bemoan the loss of his beloved wife. Her dead body is removed from his lap and is consigned to flames. Aja remains plunged in sorrow for days and days.

Sage Vasishtha, the royal preceptor, learns through his yogic powers what all has happened to the King. He is in his DIKSHA and hence is unable to go personally to console Aja. To cheer him up, he sends his disciple with a message wherein he explains that Harini, a celestial nymph, came upon this earth as Indumati due to the curse of Sage Trunabindu and that by the touch of the heavenly garland, the nymph was released from the curse. He urges the King to cast off his grief.

तदलं तदपायचिन्तया विपदुत्पत्तिमतामुपस्थिता ।
वसुधेयमवेक्ष्यतां त्वया वसुमत्या हि नृपाः कलत्रिणः ॥

"Enough then of thinking of her loss. Death falls to the lot of all who are born. This earth should be protected by you ; for, the Earth is the real wife of Kings."

मरणं प्रकृतिः शरीरिणां विकृतिः जीवितमुच्यते बुधैः ।
क्षणमप्यवतिष्ठते श्वसन् यदि जन्तुः ननु लाभवानसौ ॥

Death is natural. Life is an accident. If one lives even for a moment, one is really a gainer.

स्वशरीरशरीरिणावपि श्रुतसंयोगविपर्ययौ यदा ।
विरहः किमिवानुतापयेत् वद बाह्यैः विषयैः विपश्चितम् ॥

Since even one's body and soul are known to be united as well as disunited, say how indeed separation from external objects should pain a wise man.*

But these words of advice bear no effect on the afflicted King who continues to be grief-stricken. It looks as though the message has gone back to the sage himself!

For the sake of his young son, Aja keeps his hold on life for eight more years, after which he entrusts the kingdom to the Prince. He sheds his mortal body by throwing himself at the confluence of the Ganga and the Sarayu. He reaches heaven where he gets re-united with his Queen in her celestial form.

*The depth of Kalidasa's knowledge of Vedanta is evident here.

CHAPTER X — DASARATHA EARNS A CURSE

Aja's son, Dasaratha, begins to rule. The broad realms of the Northern Kosalas come under his sway. He tends his subjects wisely and well. No disease sets its foot in his land. Peace and prosperity reign all over his state. Indeed Dasaratha outshines his illustrious predecessors in every respect.

In his sense of justice, he ranks with Yama. He resembles Kubera in his enormous riches. In punishing the wicked, he is as firm as Varuna, while in his regal splendour he excels the Sun.

As his name goes, Dasaratha has access to all the regions and there is no place which his chariot has not touched in the Universe. Even Indra, the chief of the Devas, has many a time sought Dasaratha's help in his wars with demons.

The monarch is kind to his loyal subjects. He is stern to those who defy him. These virtues, and many more, earn for him the affection of his people.

Dasaratha weds many a princess. The rulers of the Kosala, Kekaya and Magadha kingdoms give their daughters also in marriage to him. Dasaratha bestows all his affection on these three princesses — Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra — who become the chief Queens. In their company he performs many a sacrifice on the banks of the sacred rivers Sarayu and Tamasa and erects golden pillars there.

Even at the height of bliss and happiness, Dasaratha keeps his senses under control and never does he indulge in any vice, hunting or gambling, wine or woman.

न मृगयाभिरतिः न दुरोदरं न च शशिप्रतिमाभरणं मधु ।
तमुदयाय न वा नवयौवना प्रियतमा यतमानमपाहरत् ॥

[Kalidasa portrays the advent of the spring season in this canto. The poetic flow is natural and sweet. Added to it, each verse ends in a YAMAKA which runs in a charming style.]

The Spring sets in.

कुसुमजन्म ततो नवपल्लवाः तदनु षट्पदकोकिलकूजितम् ।
इति यथाक्रम आविरभून्मधुः द्रुमवतीमवतीर्य वनस्थलीम् ॥

The bursting of flowers, the appearance of tender foliage, the humming of the bees and the songs of the nightingales — in this order does the vernal season manifest itself by descending on the thickly wooded forest sites.

The swans repair to their abodes in the lotus plants. The amorous ladies decorate their ears with the tender sprouts of the Asoka tree. The sweet fragrance of the Bakula flowers fills the air. The Kurabakas enliven the beauty of the forests. The mango trees present a smiling look with their fresh buds. Lovers have their fill of wine and merry them selves in the pleasure groves. The moonlight delights the pretty pairs. The jasmine attracts the lookers-on.

त्यजत मानमलं बत विग्रहैः न पुनरेति गतं चतुरं वयः ।
परभृताभिरितीव निवेदिते स्मरमते रमते स्म वधूजनः ॥

"Oh! you fair ones! leave aside your hauteur, enough of your quarrels, the best period of life most suited to enjoyment once gone will never return." — this dictum of the God of Love, communicated as it were by the cooing cuckoos — the women give themselves up to sport.

The Lord of the Kosalas celebrates in ecstasy the festive springtime with his Queens. The lovely season instils in him a desire to go for hunting for a few days.

Dasaratha places his Government in the hands of his Ministers and putting on a hunting costume, sets about for the royal chase.

During the hunt, many tender deer and lovely peacocks cross his path. But the noble King sees in these gentle creatures the graceful glances of his beloved Queens and does not have the heart to strike. As he goes deep into the forest, boars and buffaloes, tigers and lions, all fall a prey to his arrows. There is however no indiscriminate shooting. The haughty rhinoceroses are humbled by being deprived of their horns only; they are spared their lives. The monarch thoroughly enjoys the hunting game.

One day, Dasaratha camps on the banks of the river Tamasa. That night he takes a lonely stroll along the river brink. Suddenly the air is filled with a gurgling sound from the river. The king takes it as of an elephant drawing water up its trunk. Is not Dasaratha a master of SABDAVEDANA! (A mystery in the Science of Bow which consists in shooting down birds and beasts beyond ken, guiding oneself solely by the sounds they make.) Without thought, the king shoots off an arrow towards the direction of the sound. Alas! all at once a piteous cry pierces his ears.

हा तातेति क्रन्दितमाकर्ण्य विषण्णः तस्यान्विष्यन् वेतसगूढं प्रभवं सः ।
शल्यप्रोतं प्रेक्ष्य सकुम्भं मुनिपुत्रं तापादन्तःशल्य इवासीत् क्षितिपोऽपि ॥

"He heard the startling cry "My father!" rise
Among the reeds; rode up; before his eyes
He saw the jar, the wounded hermit boy;
Remorse transfixed his heart and killed his joy."

The noble King rushes to the spot and is mortified to see a hermit youth struck by his arrow and moaning in agony. The dying youth behests the King to take him to his blind and infirm parents nearby. Dasaratha does so. The youth can no longer bear the pain and requests the King to remove the fatal arrow from his chest.

तौ दम्पती बहु विलप्य शिशोः प्रहर्त्रा शल्यं निखातमुदहारयतामुरस्तः ।
सोऽभूत् परासुरथ भूमिपतिं शशाप हस्तार्पितैः नयनवारिभिरेव वृद्धः ॥

"The murderer then obeyed their sad behest
And drew the fixed arrow from his breast.
The boy lay dead ; the father cursed the king,
With tear-stained hands, to equal suffering."

दिष्टान्तमाप्स्यति भवानपि पुत्रशोकात् अन्त्ये वयस्यह मिवेति.........

"In sorrow for your son you too shall die,
An old, old man," he said, "as sad as I."

The aged couple burn themselves on the funeral pyre of their son. Dasaratha returns to his Capital.

This curse is indeed a blessing in disguise to the heirless king, who is happy at the prospect of a son.

CHAPTER XI — INVOCATION OF THE GODS

A little less than a myriad of years pass by. Dasaratha still remains childless. The poignancy of sorrow casts him down.

He is not yet blessed with an offspring to free him from his debt to his forefathers.

The royal priests — Risyasringa and others — perform an Ishti (sacrifice) consecrated by the Atharvana Mantras. The Ishti assures the doer, of a son.

Meanwhile, the heavenly hosts of Devas who are terribly harassed by Ravana the ten-headed Demon of Lanka, make their way to the Milky Ocean to seek refuge in Lord Vishnu who abides there. They behold Him in His supreme effulgence, reclining on the couch of the Serpent-King, ADISESHA, and reposing His feet on the lap of Lakshmi who is seated on a lotus.

The celestial ornaments adorn His hands. His sentient weapons — the conch, the discus, the mace, the bow and the sword — proclaim 'Victory' to their Lord. With folded palms waits nearby Guruda, His bird-chariot. The Gods feast their eyes on His resplendent form. With His delightful looks, Vishnu showers His grace on them. With bent heads, the Devas hymn Him high.

नमो विश्वसृजे पूर्वं विश्वं तदनु बिभ्रते ।
अथ विश्वस्य संहर्त्रे तुभ्यं त्रेधास्थितात्मने ॥

रसान्तराण्येकरसं यथा दिव्यं पयोऽश्नुते ।
देशे देशे गुणेष्वेवं अवस्थास्त्वमविक्रिय ॥

अमेयो मितलोकस्त्वं अनर्थी प्रार्थनावहः ।
अजितो जिष्णुरत्यन्तं अव्यक्तो व्यक्तकारणम् ॥

हृदयस्थमनासन्नं अकामं त्वां तपस्विनम् ।
दयालुं अनघस्पृष्टं पुराणमजरं विदुः ॥

Salutation to You, O triune Lord ! You manifest Yourself in three forms — first as the Creator of the universe, then as its Preserver and finally as its Destroyer.

Just as the sky-water, though of only one taste, acquires a diversity of flavours in different regions, so do You, though immutable, assume diverse qualities in different places.

You are immeasurable. Yet, You have measured the worlds. Though You are above desires, You are the fulfiller of others' wants. You are unconquered and ever victorious. You are indeed imperceptible. Yet, You are the cause of the manifested worlds.

You abide in the hearts of all the beings. Still You are out of reach of their senses ! An ascetic yet without any desire, You are compassionate, yet free from any woes. Oldest of the old, yet not subject to decay.

सर्वज्ञः त्वमविज्ञातः सर्वयोनिः त्वमात्मभूः ।
सर्वप्रभुरनीशस्त्वमेकस्त्व सर्वरूपभाक् ॥

सप्तसामोपगीतं त्वा सप्तार्णवजलेशयम् ।
सप्तार्चिर्मुखमाचख्युः सप्तलोकैकसंश्रयम् ॥

चतुर्वर्गफलं ज्ञानं कालावस्थाः चतुर्युगाः ।
चतुर्वर्णमयो लोकः त्वत्तः सर्वं चतुर्मुखात् ॥

अभ्यासनिगृहीतेन मनसा हृदयाश्रयम् ।
ज्योतिर्मयं विचिन्वन्ति योगिनः त्वां विमुक्तये ॥

You are omniscient but You are unknowable.
You are the source of all but You are self-born.
You are the master of all but there is none to control You
You are indeed one, but assume all forms

Like pearls that grow in ocean's night,
Like sunbeams radiantly bright,
Thy strange and wonder-working ways
Defeat extravagance of praise."

(The four versified translations are Ryder's)

प्रत्यक्षोऽप्यपरिच्छेद्यः मह्यादिर्महिमा तव ।
आप्तवागनुमानाभ्यां साध्यं त्वां प्रति का कथा ॥

केवलं स्मरणेनैव पुनासि पुरुषं यतः ।
अनेन वृत्तयः शेषाः निवेदितफलास्त्वयि ॥

Oh Lord ! Your greatness, namely this earth and other beings, though visible is not definable. What talk then about You, who are knowable only by the Vedas and inference ?

You purify an individual by his merely remembering You Hence the remaining actions of men towards You have their effects declared.

अनवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं न ते किंचन विद्यते ।
लोकानुग्रह एवैको हेतुस्ते जन्मकर्मणोः ॥

Nothing is there which You have not obtained and which is yet to be attained by you. Doing good to the world is the only one object of Your birth and actions.

महिमानं यदुत्कीर्त्य तव संह्रियते वचः ।
श्रमेण तदशक्त्या वा न गुणानामियत्तया ॥

"If songs that to thy glory tend
Should weary grow or take an end,
Our impotence must bear the blame,
And not thine unexhausted name."

(Ryder's)

Thus do the Gods propitiate Vishnu with their praise. The delighted Lord promises them safety from their enemy and a speedy deliverance to their miseries. He decides to come down among men as the son of Dasaratha and slay Ravana in battle. Brahma urges the other Devas to send

down from their own essences, sons to assist Him in His incarnation.

In meek but cheerful obedience to Brahma's commands, Indra and other Gods bring forth sons of their own essence — Vali, Sugriva and the like — monkeys that roam the woods.

The Ishti conducted by Risyasringa concludes. To the surprise of all, a Being emerges from the sacrificial fire, holding up in his hands a golden vessel containing Payasa, the essence of Vishnu.

The Divine Messenger directs the King to give the Payasa to his Queens and goes back into the fire.

Dasaratha's joy knows no bounds. Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra share the milk-essence and soon show signs of pregnancy. The monarch anxiously awaits the approaching birth of his sons.

Twelve months roll on and at the proper time a son is born to Kausalya. Seeing his charming form, the delighted King names him Rama. Kaikeyi gives birth to Bharata while Sumitra obtains two sons — Lakshmana and Satrughna.

The celestial drums beat merrily. The King's palace becomes a scene of festivity and rejoicings.

CHAPTER XII — VISWAMITRA'S MISSION

The exhilarating tidings of the birth of the heirs to King Dasaratha spread far and wide. The citizens of Ayodhya celebrate the happy event. Dasaratha performs the religious rites ordained for the occasion.

He gives away untold wealth and kine to the Brahmins. The royal children are brought up in mutual affection. Even so, Lakshmana develops special attraction towards Rama; likewise Satrughna towards Bharata. The inseparable pairs are a source of delight to their parents.

As years roll on, the four brothers pass through the sacramental rites such as Upanayanam enjoined in the Sastras. They study the Vedas and Vedangas and soon become proficient in the arts and sciences. With their perfectly sublime qualities they shine brilliantly and it looks as if they are the very incarnations of the four aims of life—Virtue, Wealth, Love and Beatitude, (धर्म, अर्थ, काम and मोक्ष). No wonder they win the hearts of the people.

It so happens that on a certain day, the sage Viswamitra who is engaged in a holy sacrifice calls on Dasaratha. He seeks the help of the valiant Rama to fight the wicked demons that prevent the due performance of the sacrifice. The King hesitates but later on, on the advice of Vasishta, the KULAGURU, meets the sages's wishes. Both Rama and his inseparable brother, Lakshmana, receive the blessings of their loving parents and leave with the sage.

Viswamitra leads the way. Armed with bows, the royal lads follow him behind. The sportive gait of the princes attracts the gazing citizens. Their curly locks of hair, wafted

by the gentle breeze, fly about their lovely faces. The holy sage knows that the boys are not accustomed to walk in the greeny verdure without the beaten tracks in the woods. He takes care that they do not feel the fatigue of the strenuous toil of the enervating journey.

तौ बलातिबलयोः प्रभावतो विद्ययोः पथि मुनिप्रदिष्टयोः ।
मम्लतुर्न मणिकुट्टिमोचितौ·········

.Viswamitra initiates Rama and Lakshmana in the two Mantras – BALA and ATIBALA. In consequence, hunger or thirst, exhaustion or weariness, does not affect the princes. Their energy and beauty are indeed reinvigorated.

तौ सरांसि रसवद्भिरम्बुभिः कूजितैः श्रुतिसुखैः पतत्रिणः ।
वायवः सुरभिपुष्परेणुभिः छायया च जलदाः सिषेविरे ॥

On the way they are more than pleased and elated with he sweet and pellucid waters of the tanks; with the melodious ongs of the birds; with the cool breezes carrying pollen dust f the fragrant flowers; and with the shades of the passing louds. Rama and Lakshmana gladden the hearts of the scetics with their comely frames.

As they march on, the sage regales the boys with many a hrilling narrative of yore. They cross the Kamasrama, once he abode of the Lord of Love, and reach the spot haunted by he dreadful demonic woman, Tataka. Viswamitra asks lama to do away with the demoness. The two pupils nplicitly obey their master's behests. They twang their ow-strings and the terrible sound pierces Tataka's ears. In ighteningly mad fury, she rushes on tumultuously towards ne direction of the sound. With a thunderous roar she prings at Rama but the latter loses no time in shooting her own. The moment his fiery shaft strikes her, she falls dead n the ground. The sage, pleased with Rama's admirable alour, initiates him into the mysteries of many a divine agical weapon. In deep reverence, the prince receives the stras and all the three then resume their journey. They

reach the Siddhasrama which was the abode of Vishnu in His incarnation as Vamana.

Viswamitra takes a vow of silence and begins his sacrifice in all ardour. The valiant brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, guard the place and the sage goes on with the sacrifice undisturbed. All at once, hordes of demons headed by Subahu and Maricha, the sons of Tataka, appear in the sky. They start raining blood and flesh on the sacrificial altar. Confusion spreads among the priests but Rama calms them down. He aims an Astra at Maricha's chest. What a wonder! The arrow carries him off with the velocity of wind and dips him down in the farthest ocean. With another arrow Rama strikes Subahu and sends him to the gates of Death.

Now, the whole place of sacrifice is free from the demons. The congregation gratefully rejoices and the Kulapati, with his self-imposed silence, concludes his sacrifice without any interruption. The sage, witnessing the happy culmination of his rite, confers his benediction on the royal youths.

Just then, Janaka, the celebrated ruler of Mithila, conducts a grand sacrifice to which he invites Viswamitra too. The sage tells the princes about the wonderful bow there. With the curiosity excited, they both accompany the sage to Mithila. As they reach the periphery of the city, they pass by a lonely hermitage. The moment Rama sets his foot in that grove, to the amazement of all, a solid stone there suddenly assumes the form of a handsome lady.

प्रत्यपद्यत चिराय यत्पुनः चारु गौतमवधूः शिलामयी ।
स्वं वपुः स किल किल्बिषच्छिदां रामपादरजसामनुग्रहः ॥

She is verily the Ahalya who once fell a victim to her husband Gautama's wrath for her unfaithful act. He has cursed her to remain an inanimate stone till Rama visits the

grove. Now the divine touch of Rama's feet redeems her from her agonising state.

Janaka is informed of the arrival of Viswamitra in the Capital. He learns too that Rama and Lakshmana, the princes of Ayodhya, have also come with the sage. The King extends a warmly magnificent welcome to the guests. Viswamitra apprises Janaka of the eagerness of the princes to have a look at the famous bow.

तस्य वीक्ष्य ललितं वपुः शिशोः पार्थिवः प्रथितवंशजन्मनः ।
स्वं विचिन्त्य च धनुर्दुरानमं पीडितो दुहितृशुल्कसंस्थया ॥

The Ruler of Mithila has already proclaimed that whoever strings the bow wins the hand of his foster-daughter, Sita. But on seeing the charming stripling lad Rama, he regrets his impulsive announcement, for, to his mind the lad is incapable of even moving it; let alone his stringing it. Turning towards the sage,

अब्रवीच्च भगवन्मतङ्गजैः यत् बृहद्भिरपि कर्म दुष्करम् ।
तत्र नाहमनुमन्तुमुत्सहे मोघवृत्ति कलभस्य चेष्टितम् ॥
ह्रेपिता हि बहवो नरेश्वराः तेन तात धनुषा धनुर्भृतः ।
ज्यानिघातकठिनत्वचो भुजान् स्वान् विधूय धिगिति प्रतस्थिरे ॥

"He said : 'O holy one, a mighty deed
That full-grown elephants with greatest pain
Could hardly be successful in, we need
Not ask of elephant-cubs. It would be vain.
For many splendid kings of valorous name,
Bearing the scars of many a hard-fought day,
Have tried and failed; then, covered with their shame,
Have shrugged their shoulders, cursed and strode away.

Janaka orders his servants to fetch the bow — the bow with which Lord Shiva had once shot his arrow at Daksha who was fleeing away in the guise of a deer.

विद्धतक्रतुमृगानुसारिण येन बाणमसृजत् वृषध्वजः ।

Soon the bow is brought. Casting his eyes on it, Rama seeks the sage's permission to try his nimble hand on it. No sooner does the prince lift the bow aloft and attempt to string it, to the stunning stupefication of all persons assembled there, than the bow snaps in twain right at the middle.

दृष्टसारमथ रुद्रकार्मुके वीर्यशुल्कमभिनन्द्य मैथिलः ।
राघवाय तनयामयोनिजां रूपिणीं श्रियमिव न्यवेदयत् ॥

Janaka's heart dances with joy. He has witnessed Rama's prowess on the mighty bow. He is relieved of his deep-seated anxiety and triumphantly rushes to offer the hand of Sita to the prince.

Dasaratha who is sent for is delighted at the happy turn of events. He starts immediately for Mithila along with his entire family and the retinue While the royal Guru, Vasishtha, and other priests are in the vanguard, the King with his Queens and princes Bharata and Satrughna, are in the rear.

On arrival at Mithila, Janaka accords them a royal reception and takes them to the wedding hall He conveys his desire to Dasaratha to give his own daughter, Urmila, in marriage to Lakshmana. The two daughters of his brother Kusadwaja are proposed for the other two princes.

पार्थिवीमुदवहद् रघूद्वहः लक्ष्मणस्तदनुजामथोर्मिलाम् ।
यौ तयोरवरजौ वरौजसौ तौ कुशध्वजसुते सुमध्यमे ॥

In all bewitching grandeur and amidst the soul-stirring chantings of Vedic Hymns, Rama weds Sita; Lakshmana takes the hand of Urmila; while Bharata and Satrughna marry Mandavi and Srutakirti. The holy sages confer their torrential blessings on the royal couples

Thus has Viswamitra's mission a happy termination.

CHAPTER XIII — RAMA AND RAMA

Dasaratha is exultant at the noble alliance. He feels legitimately proud of his valiant Rama's prowess. The news of his son's might has already reached the corners of the earth.

Taking leave of the Mithila ruler, he departs for Ayodhya in the company of his Queens and the young princely couples. Janaka gives them all a magnificent send off. Loathe to part, he follows them too. He spends three nights with them along their way and returns to his Capital.

While Dasaratha is marching along towards Ayodhya, sudden adverse winds blow arresting the march. A frightful hallow forms round the sun in the sky. The quarters become dusty and cloudy. Jackals howl on all the sides. These omens warn the king of an imminent danger. He turns therefore his enquiring eyes towards his preceptor and seeks the result of the evil portents. Vasishtha allays his fears assuring him that no mishap will befall him and all will end well.

Yonder sees the monarch of Kosalas a mighty human form, with dazzling brightness, ferociously rushing as if to wipe out one and all there. On the lofty shoulders of the dreadful person, there rests on one side a terrible axe and a bow on the other. A small rosary of Rudraksha beads hangs on his right ear. As the person draws nearer and nearer, Dasaratha's heart throbs furiously and becomes enfeebled. What a frightening look ! What a vituperative mood ! The new-comer is no other than the famous PARASURAMA – Rama with the Axe – the son of the sage Jamadagni. Has he not already laid his axe at the root of the

warrior-race thrice-sevenfold? His very sight strikes terror in the king. Dasaratha is now in the firm grip of grief and craven fear.

नाम राम इति तुल्यमात्मजे वर्तमानमहिते च दारुणे।
हृदयमस्य भयदायि चाभवत्............

The name of 'RAMA' is common to both—his own son and the furious sage. The former gladdens his heart but the latter generates fear.

Yet the dejected king picks up courage and hastens to offer respect and words of hail to Bhrigu's son (Parasurama). But Bhargava heeds them not and shoots his fiery eyes towards his namesake prince. With his face blazing up, he accuses the prince of having usurped his name and fame.

अन्यदा जगति राम इत्ययं शब्द उच्चरित एव मामगात्।
व्रीडमावहति मे स संप्रति व्यस्तवृत्तिरुदयोन्मुखे त्वयि ॥

"Oh son of Dasaratha! the word 'Rama', when uttered, went unto me, and unto me alone! But the moment you have come into prominence, that epithet denotes you and not me. A feeling of shame has thus overpowered me.

क्षत्रियान्तकरणोऽपि विक्रमः तेन मामवति नाजिते त्वयि।

Unless you are now subdued, my prowess which has brought about the destruction of the Kshatriyas does not please me.

विद्धि चात्तबलमोजसा हरेः ऐश्वरं धनुरभाजि यत्त्वया।
खातमूलमनिलो नदीरयैः पातयत्यपि मृदुस्तटद्रुमम् ॥

Know you that the bow of Ishwara that was broken by you had already been divested of its strength by the power of Hari. Even a gentle gale is enough to topple down a tree on a river bank when its roots have already been dug up by the velocity of the stream.

Let alone our fighting. You do this much. String this bow and dart an arrow from it. If this is done, I shall claim you as my victor.

> कातरोऽसि यदि वोद्गतार्चिपा तर्जितः परशुधारया मम ।
> ज्यानिघातकठिनाङ्गुलिर्वृथा बध्यतामभययाचनाङ्गुलिः ॥

But if you feel scared at the very sight of the blade of this axe of mine, fold your hands in obeisance and seek immunity from the impending danger."

These piercing words of Bhrigu's son are of no avail on the prince. With a derisive smile playing on his lips, Rama accepts the challenge. He feels that the very taking of the bow is a fitting rejoinder to the haughty sage.

> तद्धनुर्ग्रहणमेव राघवः प्रत्यपद्यत समर्थमुत्तरम् ॥

With a graceful but swift motion, Rama snatches away the bow from Bhargava's hands. What a wonder ! As he draws away the bow, he wrests the Brahmin's powers too ! As if in play, the prince strings the bow, lays an arrow on it and points it towards his foe Parasurama's pride is humbled. He stands aghast with dismayed look, white with fear. Compassion engulfs suddenly Rama's heart.

Parasurama is of course his enemy — an arch enemy to the entire race of Kshatriya kings. But the prince knows that a Brahmin should not be killed at all He therefore addresses the sage :

> न प्रहर्तुमलमस्मि निर्दयं विप्र इत्यभिभवत्यपि त्वयि ।
> शंस किं गतिमनेन पत्रिणा हन्मि लोकमुत ते मखार्जितम् ॥

"You are no doubt my assailant. Yet feelings of pity deter me from striking you without showing you any mercy because you happen to be a Brahmin. Tell me now what I should do next with this arrow. Am I to take away your powers of motion or shall I deprive you of the world acquired by you with your sacrifices ?"

Parasurama replies beseechingly.

प्रत्युवाच तमृषिर्न तत्त्वतः त्वां न वेद्मि पुरुषं पुरातनम् ।
गां गतस्य तव धाम वैष्णवं कोपितो ह्यसि मया दिदृक्षुणा ॥

"No doubt I know you as the Primordial Being in reality. But my deliberate provocation has been to bring out in bold relief the Vaishnava power in you — you, who have descended on this earth.

तद्गतिं मतिमतां वरेप्सिता पुण्यतीर्थगमनाय रक्ष मे ।
पीडयिष्यति न मां खिलीकृता स्वर्गपद्धतिरभोगलोलुपम् ॥

I entreat you not to take away the coveted powers of motion for going to holy places. The denial to me of the gates of Heaven would not cause me any grief, for, physical enjoyments are no charm to me."

Raghava readily assents. The moment he darts the shaft, *it acts as a dam to the sage's path to Heaven.*

राघवोऽपि चरणौ तपोनिधेः क्षम्यतामिति वदन् समस्पृशत् ।
निर्जितेषु तरसा तरस्विना शत्रुषु प्रणतिरेव कीर्तये ॥

With all humility, Rama touches the holy sage's feet and holds him in high reverence. Does not the display of courtesy by the valiant towards their vanquished foes add to their glory ?

The penitent, Parasurama bids goodbye and departs. Dasaratha's joy transcends all limits. He feels as if he has been restored to life ! He hugs Rama in gratitude. The royal family resumes its journey. After spending a few nights on the way, Dasaratha reaches his Capital among joyous acclamations of welcome of his subjects.

CHAPTER XIV — BANISHMENT OF RAMA

The citizens of Ayodhya are rollicking at the arrival of the new royal brides. As Sita and other princessess pass through the streets, the women-folk fondly gaze at them in mystifying admiration through the windows on the top of the mansions.

The whole city presents a gorgeously festive look. With his thrilling heart, pulsating with joy, Dasaratha enters the palace together with the princely couples. Later, Bharata along with his brother Satrughna leaves for his uncle's home.

Rama, ever true as to his name, delights the subjects with his pleasant manners. Every one of them finds in him a true friend, a near relative, a timely helper and a great benefactor. He wins the heart of one and all by his exemplary personal virtues. He spends many happy years in the sweet and charming company of his beloved.

Dasaratha has now become pretty sagging. He has enjoyed all the blessings of life. It appears to him as if his days on this earth are drawing nigh and his final emancipation from his mortal frame is near at hand.

(See the poet's imagination here)

तं कर्णमूलमागत्य रामे श्रीः न्यस्यतामिति ।
कैकेयीशङ्कयेवाह पलितच्छद्मना जरा ॥

Old Age in the guise of grey hair comes to the bottom of Dasaratha's ears and, as if out of fear from Kaikeyi, whispers to him 'Let the royal insignia be placed on Rama.'

The monarch rightly decides to hand over the reins of the kingdom to his eldest prince. He announces his plan to

the public. The people are extravagantly elated at the happy turn of events. They set their hearts in making magnificent preparations for Rama's installation on the throne. Destiny, however, interferes as if in mischief and makes the the Queen Kaikeyi turn the arrangements, with an envious eye, for her aggrandizement. Has she not secured from her uxorious husband two boons to be asked at her will? Now is the opportune time for her. She interposes By one boon she seeks the exile of Rama for fourteen years; and by the other, the crowning of Bharata in his stead. The King is plunged into immense grief. He tries to make her relent but in vain.

Dasaratha will not however eat his words. He was perforce made to grant the boons. Rama readily bestirs himself to redeem the solemn words of his father and with a gladdened heart prepares to wend his way to the woods together with his beloved wife and his inseparable brother, Lakshmana.

दधतो मङ्गलक्षौमे वसानस्य च वल्कले ।
ददृशुः विस्मितास्तस्य मुखरागं समं जनाः ॥

This tragic denouement makes the people look at Rama with consternation and they fail to see any perceptible evidence of any emotional change in his happy sedate mien. Cheerfully does he cast away the auspicious silken clothes and set out clad in garments of barks of trees.

Frail Dasaratha bears not the pangs of his son's separation The curse once laid on him by the parents of the hermit youth rears its ugly head to pillory him with tantalysing agony. Alas! The old king dies. The realm of Kosalas is without king. The Ministers hasten to fetch Bharata back to Ayodhya. On arrival, the prince is apprised of the sorrowful events and is prevailed upon to accept the kingship.

श्रुत्वा तथाविधं मृत्युं कैकेयीतनयः पितुः ।
मातुर्न केवलं स्वस्याः श्रियोऽप्यासीत् पराङ्मुखः ॥

Bharata learns of the evil machinations of his mother and the resultant death of his dear father. Not only does he turn his face away in derision from her, he sternly spurns the offer of sovereignty too outright.

At once he departs to the forest with the concourse of his army, determined to bring Rama back to rule the kingdom. The two brothers meet in Chitrakoota. Bharata imploringly supplicates to Rama to return.

स हि प्रथमजे तस्मिन् अकृतश्रीपरिग्रहे ।
परिवेत्तारमात्मानं मेने स्वीकरणात् भुवः ॥

The younger brother considers himself to be a PARIVETTA by accepting the kingship when his elder brother has not taken possession of Rajya Sri.*

तमशक्यमपाक्रष्टुं निदेशात् स्वर्गिणः पितुः ।
ययाचे पादुके पश्चात्कर्तुं राज्याधिदेवते ॥
स विसृष्टस्तथेत्युक्त्वा भ्रात्रा नैवाविशत् पुरीम् ।
नन्दिग्रामगतस्तस्य राज्यं न्यासमिवाभुनक् ॥
दृढभक्तिरिति ज्येष्ठे राज्यतृष्णापराङ्मुखः ।
मातुः पापस्य भरतः प्रायश्चित्तमिवाकरोत् ॥

Bharata's pathetic pleadings and fervent prayers are of no avail. Realization dawns on him that his elder brother cannot be drawn away from acting on the injunctions of their father. Equally determined not to be the monarch, the noble Bharata begs Rama's pair of divine sandals for installing them as the presiding deity of the kingdom. Rama readily accedes. Receiving the sandals, the younger brother treks his gloomy way back—not to Ayodhya—but to Nandigrama in the outskirts of the city, from where he looks after the kingdom like a trust. This lofty action of Bharata, who is averse to lust of power, seems as if he has atoned for his mother's heinous sin.

*Parivetta is the younger brother who marries while his elder remains unmarried. It is deemed to be a sin.

प्रभावस्तम्भितच्छायमाश्रितः स वनस्पतिम् ।
कदाचिदङ्के सीतायाः शिश्ये किंचिदिव श्रमात् ॥

ऐन्द्रिः किल नखैस्तस्या विददार स्तनौ द्विजः ॥

तस्मिन्नास्थदिषीकास्त्रं रामो रामावबोधितः ।
आत्मानं मुमुचे तस्मादेकनेत्रव्ययेन सः ॥

Rama leads an anchorite's life in the forest. One day he is slightly fatigued and slumbers for a while on the lap of Sita under a shady tree. The haughty son of Indra comes there in the form of a crow and torments her. Awakened from his nap, Rama darts a reed-missile at the mischievous crow. The arrow chases him out wherever he goes for shelter. Finding no way out, Indra's son frees himself finally from its hot pursuit by giving up one of his eyes.

Suspecting the return of Bharata because of the close proximity, Rama leaves Chitrakoota and goes towards the south.

In their sojourn, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita halt for a few days in the homes of the holy hermits and avail themselves of their hospitality. Reach they then Maharshi Atri's Ashrama, where the sage's wife, Anasuya, bestows on Sita a peculiar fragrant unguent which gives her a lasting beauty. Taking leave of the sage, the three delve deep into the dense forests of the Dandaka.

सध्याभ्रकपिशस्तस्य विराधो नाम राक्षसः ।
अतिष्ठन्मार्गमावृत्य रामस्येन्दोरिव ग्रहः ॥

स जहार तयोर्मध्ये मैथिलीं लोकशोषणः ॥

तं विनिष्पिष्य काकुत्स्थौ पुरा दूषयति स्थलीम् ।
गन्धेनाशुचिना चेति वसुधायां निचख्नतुः ॥

Suddenly, a huge monster, Viradha obstructs Rama's path as the planet Rahu does of the moon. That pest of the world snatches Sita away from their midst. But the two

brothers lose no time in felling him down. They then bury him in the bowels of the earth ere long his noisome stench contaminates the forest tract.

As they journey further, they come across the abode of Sage Agastya. The Rishi blesses them and significantly directs them to Panchavati.

CHAPTER XV — RAVANA NEARS HIS DOOM

Bidding adieu to Agastya, Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana proceeds to the place marked out for them by the sage.

They reach the banks of the River Godavari and sight the lovely serene spot, Panchavati, so named on account of the five huge banyan trees there Lakshmana puts up a nice spacious cottage as enjoined by his brother and they spend many years in blissful happiness and beatitude.

रावणावरजा तत्र राघवं मदनातुरा ।
अभिपेदे निदाघार्ता व्यालीव मलयद्रुमम् ॥
सा सीतासंनिधावेव तं वव्रे कथितान्वया ।
अत्यारूढो हि नारीणामकालज्ञो मनोभवः ॥

One day, there comes to their abode, a Rakshasi, Soorpanaka She is the younger sister of Ravana, the ruler of Lanka. Struck with the charming complexion of Rama, as if in an impulse, she is furiously infatuated with passion. With her heart blinded by intemperate lust, the demoness takes a covetous form and approaches the elder prince just as in hot weather the dreadful cobra makes for the sandal tree In the very presence of Sita, she starts wooing Rama delineating her lineage. The passion of women when grown to excess knows not proper or improper time !

Rama listens to her words with calmness. He strikes out a plan to keep the love-lorn lady off He addresses her :

कलत्रवानहं बाले कनीयांसं भजस्व मे ।
इति रामो वृषस्यन्तीं वृषस्कन्धः शशास ताम् ॥

'Oh, young girl! My spouse is here, as you now see with your own eyes. But my younger brother yonder there is now without a wife. You. therefore, go to him'

ज्येष्ठाभिगमनात् पूर्वं तेनाप्यनभिनन्दिता ।
साभूद्रामाश्रया भूयः नदीवोभयकूलभाक् ॥

The passionate lady is not accepted by Lakshmana too on the ground that she has courted his brother first. The amorous woman dashes back to Rama once again like a river which hurls itself from one bank to the other.

Sita is so naively amused at her passionate overtures to Rama and Lakshmana that she could not but laugh Unable to brook the insult, the demoness bursts forth into a paroxysm of anger. She frightens Sita with her furious words:

फलमस्योपहासस्य मद्यः प्राप्स्यसि पश्य माम् ।
मृग्याः परिभवो व्याघ्र्यां इत्यवेहि त्वया कृतम् ॥

इत्युक्त्वा मैथिलीं भर्तुरङ्के निविशतीं भयात् ।
रूपं शूर्पणखा नाम्नः सहशं प्रत्यपद्यत ॥

Look! You will ere long reap the fruit of this jeering of yours. Dare you, a poor doe, insult me, a tigress!

So saying, she assumes her natural hideous form which is in keeping with her name — one who has her nails as broad as a winnow. Out of craven fear, Sita hugs her beloved.

Lakshmana who has just heard her speak sweetly like a cuckoo but now in a terrific yelping like that of a jackal, makes her out as one who has had an 'assumed' appearance. Rushing towards the wicked lady, he unsheaths his sword and deforms her face. Already she has an ugly form and this deterrent action of Lakshmana renders her look now doubly ugly. With blood oozing all over, she soars up the sky and threatens the princes with dire consequences.

प्राप्य चाशु जनस्थानं खरादिभ्यः तथाविधम् ।
रामोपक्रममाचख्यौ रक्षःपरिभवं नवम् ॥

Without any loss of time, Soorpanaka makes her way towards Janasthana and reports to her kinsmen, Khara and his brother giants, the new humiliation to their kith and kin by Rama, a mere mortal. Stung by this news, the infuriated brothers along with an overwhelming army of Rakshasas rush tumultuously towards Panchavati. Soorpanaka guides them.

मुखावयवलूनां ता नैऋता यत्पुरो दधुः ।
रामाभियायिनां तेषां तदेवाभूदमङ्गलम् ॥

The fact that the assailing Rakshasas are led by a deformed lady is in itself a premonition portending their perdition. (*The sight of a mutilated person among other things is indeed inauspicious to one who commences a journey.*)

Khara and his hosts arrive very near Rama's abode. The Prince sees them drawing nigh with hauteur brandishing aloft their naked swords and other lethal weapons. Entrusting Sita to the care of Lakshmana, Rama adroitly advances to fight them single-handedly.

एको दाशरथिः काम यातुधानाः सहस्रशः ।
ते तु यावन्त एवाजौ तावाश्च ददृशे स तैः ॥
असज्जनेन काकुत्स्थः प्रयुक्तमथ दूषणम् ।
न चक्षमे शुभाचारः स दूषणमिवात्मनः ॥

Rama is alone. The Rakshasas are in thousands. But every one of the Rakshasas sees a Rama before him on the field of battle. (*This is due to the effect of Rama's Mohanastra*)

The cruel Rakshasas send forth first their Chief, Dooshana, to fight against Rama. But Rama does not tolerate the former even for a while, in the same way as he would not brook any taunt (दूषण) bruited against him by wicked people. (*The word-play on 'dooshana' is suggestively striking*) Dooshana is hotly despatched.

Then the three-headed monster, Trisiras, rushes towards Rama. In the battle that ensues, Rama takes off the three

heads of his enemy with three sharp arrows Bereft of life, he tumbles to the ground.

Blazing with wrath, Khara now faces Rama in a duel. Alas! All the strength of the demon comes to naught. He too meets the same fate as that of his brothers.

In that vast army of Rakshasas, felled by the shafts of Rama, nothing else save many a headless and mutilated trunk is seen to rise.

Soorpanaka,. the sole survivor, flees to Lanka with maddening alacrity and conveys the heart-rending news to Ravana.

निग्रहात् स्वसुराप्तानां वधाच्च धनदानुजः ।
रामेण निहितं मेने पदं दशसु मूर्धसु ॥

The harrowing chastisement meted out to his sister and the incredibly wiping out of his kinsmen at Janasthana inflames the Rakshasa king. Overwhelmed with surging feelings of humiliation, he deems it as if Rama has trodden triumphantly on his ten heads.

Intent on abducting Sita, Ravana hastens to Panchavati. Rama and Lakshmana are lured by the demon Maricha in the guise of an antelope. Now, Sita is alone. Ravana seizes this golden opportunity and carries her off. The Vulture-King, Jatayu, a great friend of Dasaratha, fails in his attempt to deter the wily Ravana.

स रावणहृतां ताभ्यां वचसाचष्ट मैथिलीम् ।
आत्मनः सुमहत्कर्म व्रणैरावेद्य संस्थितः ॥

During their search for Sita, the grief-stricken brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, sight the prostrate bird with ebbing life. The wounds on his body are proof positive of his heroic and unequal struggle with the ten-headed demon. Jatayu has the last embers of life left to apprise the princes only of the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana.

Is not Jatayu their sire's bosom friend? Has he not given his very life for them? They both perform the funeral rites from cremation onwards for the bird as for their own father. Their grief over their father's death has been renewed.

But Sita must be traced at any cost.

वधनिर्धूतशापस्य कबन्धस्योपदेशतः ।
मुमूर्च्छ सख्य रामस्य समानव्यसने हरौ ॥

The sons of Dasaratha then journey southward. A Rakshasa, Kabandha by name, hinders their path. No sooner do they both make short work of the demon, than he is absolved of his previous curse. He assumes a celestial form and directs Rama and his brother to Mount Risyamuka nearby to make friends with the Vanara Prince, Sugriva, who is in the very same plight and predicament. *(Sugriva has been banished from his kingdom by his elder brother Vali and is leading a miserably lonely life forced on him.)*

Rama complies with this direction. Vali is killed and his brother is installed on the throne of Kishkindha. Sugriva soon gratefully sends his monkey-chiefs towards all directions in search of Sita.

प्रवृत्तावुपलब्धायां तस्याः सपातिदर्शनात् ।
मारुतिः सागरं तीर्णः संसारमिव निर्ममः ॥

दृष्टा विचिन्वता तेन लङ्कायां राक्षसीवृता ॥
जानकी विषवल्लीभिः परीतेव महौषधिः ।
तस्यै भर्तुरभिज्ञानमङ्गुलीयं ददौ कपिः ॥

Hanuman, the son of Vayu and the most valiant of the chiefs, reaches the shores of Southern ocean along with Angada and others. As if in good luck, they come across the Vulture Sampati, the elder brother of Jatayu, and learn from him of the whereabouts of Sita. The humble and prideless Maruti crosses the ocean and sets his foot on Lanka even as one free from worldly attachments leaps across the sea of life.

After thorough and extensive search, Hanuman locates Sita surrounded by Rakshasis in Ravana's Ashoka Grove, like the all-healing herb is entwined by other noxious creepers. He delights her with Rama's message and hands over to her the signet-ring sent by her husband. Sita weeps for joy.

निर्वाप्य प्रियसन्देशैः सीतामक्षवधोद्धतः ।
स ददाह पुरीं लंकां क्षणसोढारिनिग्रहः ॥
प्रत्यभिज्ञानरत्नं च रामायादर्शयत्कृती ।
हृदयं स्वयमायातं वैदेह्या इव मूर्तिमत् ॥
श्रुत्वा रामः प्रियोदन्तं मेने तत्सङ्गमोत्सुकः ।
महार्णवपरिक्षेपं लंकायाः परिखालघुम् ॥

To leave a stamp of his visit, the son of Vayu destroys the trees of the grove. Ravana's son, Aksha, challenges the monkey-chief to a duel but meets his end. The victory-intoxicated Maruti allows himself to be bound by his enemies for a while He consumes the whole city of Lanka to conflagration with flames of fire from his lighted tail.

With the speed of wind, he returns to Rama and submits Sita's crest-jewel which he has brought from her as a countertoken. The ornament looks as if Sita's very heart has come there in flesh and blood. In rapturous joy, Rama hugs the jewel as if he embraces Sita.

Hanuman's narration of the detailed account of Sita evokes in Rama an eagerness to join her soon. The nature's belt of the great sea round Lanka seems to him as a mere moat, easy to cross. Along with hordes of war intoxicated monkey-armies, march Rama and Lakshmana with frantic zeal towards the South.

CHAPTER XVI — VIBHISHANA'S CORONATION

With boundless joy and invigorating cheer the solid phalanx of the Vanara legions move on with resplendent rhythm through mountainous terrains and plains.

The overwhelming numerical strength is too incredible but it is a reality and no exaggeration if it is described that the whole surface of the earth is shrouded with the swarms of the monkey hordes. Some take flying hops on to the vast expanse of the unending arc of the sky and hide the blue from the view. Marching through land, water and air, they reach the very outskirts of the Southern Ocean.

Rama enjoins Sugriva to pitch his camp on the sea-shore and convenes the meeting of the Commanders-in-Chief, Sugriva, Hanuman and others to decide future course of action to cross the deep waters. Sudden and frantic but plaintive cries are heard from far too high above the sky and exactly over their heads Amazed and dismayed at the cries, the monkey columns look up. There they behold a mighty *splendrous Rakshasa proclaiming his lineage, announcing* his name as Vibhishana and offering his unconditional surrender unto Rama He is no other than the younger brother of Ravana. Ah! What a contrast between the two brothers! The attributes of his elder brother are conspicuously absent in the younger one who clings tenaciously to the righteous path of dedicated virtue. He has relentlessly prevailed on Ravana to restore Sita to her husband but this solemn serious advice falls flat in the ears of the ill-fated and the evil-intended demon. This wholesome but sour advice of Vibhishana is the prime cause of his having been turned out of Lanka for good. This juxtaposition impels Vibhishana to seek refuge in

Rama. *(The poet vividly portrays it as if the Rakshasa Goddess of magnificent prosperity, enamoured of the saintly and noble virtues of Vibhishana, besought him to flee to Rama for shelter, succour and sceptre.)*

निविष्टमुदधेः कूले तं प्रपेदे विभीषणः ।
स्नेहात् राक्षसलक्ष्म्येव बुद्धिमाविश्य चोदितः ॥
तस्मै निशाचरैश्वर्यं प्रतिशुश्राव राघवः ।
काले खलु समारब्धाः फलं बध्नन्ति नीतयः ॥

Rama views him as having come at the opportune and propitious time and also at the proper place. Not only he readily proffers him safety but even vouchsafes triumphantly the Rakshasa of his being installed as Sovereign of Lanka. Political sagacity manifests itself visibly in the employment of appropriate and judicious expedients bringing forth the desired results.

स सेतुं बन्धयामास प्लवगैः लवणाम्भसि ।
रसातलादिवोन्मग्नं शेषं स्वप्नाय शार्ङ्गिणः ॥

Losing no time, and with the aid of the devoted hordes of monkeys, Rama builds a causeway across the briny blue waters. (The bridge is visualized as the Serpent Sesha having risen from the fathomless bottoms for the repose of Vishnu. The habitat of Adisesha whose labyrinthine coils are the velveting couch for Vishnu, is supposed to be in the under-world. He is looked upon as supporting this very globe of ours on his thousand hoods. Kalidasa touches on this belief in his immortal Sakuntala too — (शेषस्सदैवाहितभूमिभारः — Act V-verse 4)

तेनोत्तीर्य पथा लंकां रोधयामास पिङ्गलैः ।
द्वितीयं हेमप्राकारं कुर्वद्भिरिव वानरैः ॥

Through the improvised bridge cross the monkey hordes to the very frontiers of Ravana's impregnable Lanka and besiege the city. The auburn-coloured Vanaras form as if a second shining rampart of golden hue.

रणः प्रववृते तत्र भीमः प्लवगरक्षसाम् ।
दिग्विजृम्भितकाकुत्स्थपौलस्त्यजयघोषणः ॥

Rama arrays the columns of his army according to the decided plan. A titanic struggle rages between the two — the monkeys and the rakshasas. "Victory to Rama" is the triumphant cry of the war-intoxicated vanaras. "Victory to Ravana" is, in boisterous reciprocation, of Rakshasas in equal cadence of tone.

पादपाविद्धपरिघः शिलानिष्पिष्टमुद्गरः ।
अतिशस्त्रनखन्यासः शैलरुग्णमतङ्गजः ॥

The rakshasas are armed to the teeth They use all kinds of lethal weapons. The monkeys have scarcely any except claws. The iron clubs thrown at them by the demons are shattered by the vanara heroes with huge trees. The massive mallets are pulverized with rocks. The plunge of claws far outmatches the use of weapons and the trumpeting war elephants are silenced for ever by the boulders flung at them

अथ रामशिरश्छेददर्शनोद्भ्रान्तचेतनाम् ।
सीतां मायेति शंसन्ती त्रिजटा समजीवयत् ॥

As the war is thus on, Sita in the Ashoka grove is shown the severed head of her beloved consort, wrought out of perplexing voodooism The gruesome sight stuns her and she falls into a swoon. Trijata attending on her exposes the vagaries of magic—MAYA. Sita abandons her grief and comes to herself again.

गरुडापातविश्लिष्टमेघनादास्त्रबन्धनः ।
दाशरथ्योः क्षणक्लेशः स्वप्नवृत्त इवाभवत् ॥

Meghanada, the son of Ravana, steeped in wiles and a past-master in the science of magic warfare, releases his Nagastra. Out fly furiously thousands of hissing venomous snakes. They bite and bind the vanara hordes. Alas! what a ghastly sight! Rama and Lakshmana too are the victims.

They writhe with pain on the ground and lie as if they are mortally wounded.

The mysterious advent of Garuda there releases one and all from the serpent bondage. The assailing torment inflicted on the princes, even though temporarily, vanishes like an incident in a dream.

Ravana with blazing wrath enters the battlefield, brandishing aloft his potent Sakti. He aims the missile at Lakshmana's chest and lo ! the young prince, struck with it, falls on the ground almost dead. Rama cannot bear the agonising sight. In strong fight, he drives away Ravana out of the field. His heart too, although not hit by the weapon, sunders because of grief.

With lightning speed, Hanuman goes and brings the ambrosial herb which heals the wounds on the body of Lakshmana. He is up again to slay his foes. (*Here the poet employs a beautiful figure of speech* पर्यायोक्त. *Instead of saying directly that the women in Lanka lost their husbands, he writes ' Lakshmana with his arrows taught the women how to weep !*)'

Death impels Indrajit to face Lakshmana in a straight combat. Lakshmana silences once for all the mighty twang of Meghanada's bow.

कुम्भकर्णः कपीन्द्रेण तुल्यावस्थः स्वसुः कृतः ॥
अकाले बोधितो भ्रात्रा प्रियस्वप्नो वृथा भवान् ।
रामेषुभिरितीवासौ दीर्घनिद्रां प्रवेशितः ॥

Ravana is now plunged in grief. He causes his brother Kumbhakarna to be roused from slumber. The roused Rakshasa furiously proceeds straight to the battlefield. Sugriva takes a swift bounce on to him and disfigures his face The demon is reduced to the same deformed plight of his sister, Soorpanakha.

"In vain have you, who are fond of sleep, been aroused at an untimely hour by your brother" — with these words, as it

were, the demon is sent to eternal sleep by the arrows of Rama.

All the chiefs in the Rakshasa forces share the same fate as Kumbhakarna.

निर्ययावथ पौलस्त्यः पुनर्युद्धाय मन्दिरात् ।
अरावणमरामं वा जगदद्येति निश्चितः ॥

Ravana's fury knows no limits. "This day the world shall be rid of one of us, either Ravana or Rama" — so punctuating, the ten-headed demon rushes his way to the field of battle.

Indra, the King of Gods, feels sore that Rama fights on foot whereas Ravana does so seated on the chariot. He therefore sends to Rama his own chariot drawn by green horses. Matali, Indra's charioteer, puts on Raghava his master's impenetrable armour.

Rama and Ravana face each other. An opportunity arises for both to present their valour in a duel. Though Ravana is one and one only, on account of his numerous hands and heads he looks like a whole host of rakshasas.

जेतारं लोकपालानां स्वमुखैरर्चितेश्वरम् ।
रामस्तुलितकैलासमरातिं बह्वमन्यत ॥

RAMA DENIES NOT THE DEVIL HIS DUE. He holds his foe in magnificent esteem. For, has not the Rakshasa subdued the guardians of the eight cardinal quarters by his strength ? Has he not won the heart of Lord Siva by the sacrifice of his own heads in the course of his severe penance ? Nay, he has once even lifted Mount Kailasa as if in play with his twenty hands ! No wonder — these acts of prowess earn for Ravana a praise even from his enemy

In frantic fury, Ravana darts a mighty arrow into Rama's right arm. The arm throbs and indicates his rejoining his dear Sita soon (*It is believed that the throbbing of right hand of a male presages some good fortune.*)

Rama, in turn, shoots an arrow right into the chest of his foe. It harrows into his heart and plunges deep into the earth below as if to convey the exhilarating news to the serpents of the nether world. *(The denizens of Nagaloka are in mortal fear of Ravana ever since he has forcibly abducted their damsels.)*

The two combatants—Rama and Ravana—are equal in every respect They show their skill alternately, making it difficult *for the Goddess of Victory, which side to choose.*

अयःसंकुचितां रक्षः शतघ्नीमथ शत्रवे ।
हुतां वैवस्वतस्येव कूटशाल्मलिमक्षिपत् ॥

राघवो रथमप्राप्तां तामाशां च सुरद्विषाम् ।
अर्धचन्द्रमुखैर्बाणैः चिच्छेद कदलीसुखम् ॥

Ravana hurls at his enemy a Sataghni, studded with iron spikes—a mace that kills a large number at a time—resembling the Club of the God of Death. But before it reaches his chariot, Rama amazingly splinters it down with his crescent-shaped arrows as he would of a plantain-tree. The hopes of the gods' foes sink with it.

अमोघं सदये चास्मै धनुष्येकधनुर्धरः ।
ब्राह्ममस्त्रं प्रियाशोकशल्यनिष्कर्षणौषधम् ॥

Raghava decides to bring Ravana's doom. The matchless archer releases the infallible Brahmastra against Ravana. With a maddening roar, the Astra shoots off and shears the ten heads of the demon in the twinkling of the eye. Ravana drops down dead.

The gods witnessing the fight rejoice at the glorious victory of Rama. *They shower fragrant flowers* from above on him.

Rama sends the chariot back to Indra. Amidst triumphant rejoicings, he instals Vibhishana on the throne of Lanka.

Rama accepts Sita after her purication by fire. He sets out for Ayodhya in the aerial chariot, Pushpaka, along with Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Sugriva and all other Vanara hosts

[In the 12th Canto of Raghuvamsa the readers will observe that Kalidasa has adopted minor deviations from the original Epic of Valmeeki. For instance, it is Sarama — and not Trijata — who consoles Sita when she is shown the faked severed head of Rama. Moreover in Ramayana this incident occurs just after the landing of Rama in Lanka and before the battle commences

Secondly, the death of Kumbhakarna precedes the fall of Indrajit in Valmeeki's Epic whereas the poet has reversed the order in his present work

Kalidasa's poetic genius is borne out in his having condensed thrillingly in short compass of 100 verses of Anushtub metre, the entire five Kandas (460 chapters) of the Great Epic.]

CHAPTER XVII — RAMA'S AERIAL WAY BACK

At the command of Raghava, the celestial car, PUSHPAKA, takes off towards the North. Rama assures himself that every one in the chariot is cosy and comfortable.

The plane soars high into the sky and speeds across the ocean. The turbulent waters below present them an enthralling scene. Rama yearns to show to his beloved the various places of interest on the return route and acquaint her with all the incidents associated with them. He therefore speaks to her aside :

वैदेहि पश्यामलयाद्विभक्त मत्सेतुना फेनिलमम्बुराशिम् ।
छायापथेनेव शरत्प्रसन्नं आकाशमाविष्कृतचारुतारम् ॥

Dearest Janaki, behold this grand causeway down below built by me right across the sea, stretching from the yonder Malaya Mountain to Lanka here. Look, how splendidly it sunders the foamy blue ocean into two, like the Milky Way running across the clear blue sky lit with stars

This watery waste indeed owes its existence to my forbears — the great sons of Sagara — who dug it in their search for their father's sacrificial horse.

गर्भं दधत्यर्कमरीचयोऽस्मात् विवृद्धिमत्राश्नुवते वसूनि ।
अबिन्धनं वह्निमसौ बिभर्ति प्रह्लादनं ज्योतिरजन्यनेन ॥

The rays of the Sun draw the water from this very ocean. Untold treasures are ever on the increase here This sea bears the submarine fire, BADABA. The pleasant luminary (Moon) has emerged from this mighty deep. Its vastness on all sides is beyond determination.

नाभिप्ररूढाम्बुरुहासनेन संस्तूयमानः प्रथमेन धात्रा ।
अमुं युगान्तोचितयोगनिद्रः संहृत्य लोकान् पुरुषोऽधिशेते ॥

Lord Vishnu, the Adi Purusha, reposes in these waters in His Yogic Sleep after absorbing within himself all the worlds at the time of Deluge, the First Brahma seated on the lotus sprung from His navel eulogising Him high.

Oh, Sita! It is these waters that once offered refuge to the numerous high mountains which sought shelter at the time of Indra's lopping off their wings When in Boar's shape the Lord raised Mother Earth on His tusk from the nether world, Her face wore these waters like a shroud.

Mark you, this place where the rivers flow into the frightful sea. The ocean with its swirling waves rolling over the river waters seems as if it kisses the lips of rivers and make them reciprocate.

ससत्त्वमादाय नदीमुखाम्भः संमीलयन्तो विवृताननत्वात् ।
अमी शिरोभिस्तिमयः सरन्ध्रैरूर्ध्वं वितन्वन्ति जलप्रवाहान् ॥

Behold here this comely sight. The whales swim against the rivers keeping their mouths wide open and gulping the waters along with the living creatures. Slowly they close their jaws and squirt the water through the holes in their heads.

Here are the serpents shining with gem-set hoods, basking felicitously on the beach for rich fare of the cool breeze.

Yonder see the clouds eddying themselves when they sweep down to drink the water. It looks as if the roaring ocean is being churned again

क्वचित् पथा संचरते सुराणां क्वचिद् घनानां पततां क्वचिच्च ।
यथाविधो मे मनसोऽभिलाषः प्रवर्तते पश्य तथा विमानम् ॥

Observe this celestial car, Oh Sita. It courses sometimes through the path of the gods, (highest region), sometimes through that of the clouds (next lower) and at other

times through that of the birds (and still below) as my heart desires.

Thus has the plane travelled in a moment the aerial regions over the briny waters. It now passes over the outskirts of the Sourthern coast where pearls and gems lie scattered and where are seen countless rows of fruit-laden areca trees.

Rama orders the chariot to fly quickly to the Janasthana which is now rid of the demons and other hostile elements. The hermits have come back to their old homes. Pointing out to a place, Rama addresses Sita :

सैषा स्थली यत्र विचिन्वता त्वां भ्रष्टं मया नूपुरमेकमुर्व्याम् ।
अदृश्यत त्वच्चरणारविन्दविश्लेषदुःखादिव बद्धमौनम् ॥

"There is the spot where, sorrowfully searching,
I found an anklet, on the ground one day :
It could not tinkle for it was not perching
On your dear foot, but sad and silent lay."

त्वं रक्षसा भीरु यतोऽपनीता तं मार्गमेताः कृपया लता मे ।
आदर्शयन्वक्तुमशक्नुवत्यः शाखाभिरावर्जितपल्लवाभिः ॥

"I learned where you were carried by the giant
From vines that showed themselves compassionate :
They could not utter words, yet with their pliant
Branches they pointed where you passed of late."

[The plane now flies high above the peak of the Malyavan Mount.]

मृग्यश्च दर्भाङ्कुरनिर्व्यपेक्षाः तवागतिज्ञं समबोधयन्माम् ।
व्यापारयन्त्यो दिशि दक्षिणस्यां उत्पक्ष्मराजीनि विलोचनानि ।

"The deer were kind: for while the juicy grasses
Fell quite unheeded from each careless mouth,
They turned wide eyes that said,' 'Tis there she passes
The hours as weary captive' toward the south."

पूर्वानुभूतं स्मरता च यत्र कम्पोत्तरं भीरु तवोपगूढम् ।
गुहाविसारीण्यतिवाहितानि मया कथंचिद्घनगर्जितानि ॥

CHAPTER XVIII — THE INSTALLATION OF RAMA

As Rama's aerial car hovers over Sarayu which flows through the metropolis Ayodhya, it stops still for a while.

The moment Raghava sets his eyes on the clear waters, his heart exultingly goes pit-a-pat for joy — for, is it not that long fourteen years have lapsed since he feasted his eyes over her pleasing crystal waters?

The sacred meandering river rises from the very lake 'Manasa Saras' in the Himalayan ranges. Indeed, countless are the times when her waters have been sanctified too by the ceremonial baths of the Kings of Ikshwaku race at the end of their horse sacrifices.

The sacrificial pillars erected by them stand as mementos on her very banks The cool breeze generated by her ripples blows on Rama, making him feel that she embraces him, as if a mother does, with her hands of waves.

The plane now glides slowly towards the frontiers of the city. Rama sees a sudden cloud of dust appearing in the air. Looking to Sita, he says :

विरक्तसध्याकपिशं पुरस्ताद्यतो रजः पार्थिवमुज्जिहीते ।
शङ्के हनूमत्कथितप्रवृत्तिः प्रत्युद्गतो मां भरतः ससैन्यः ॥
अद्धा श्रियं पालितसंगराय प्रत्यर्पयिष्यत्यनघां स साधुः ।
हत्वा निवृत्ताय मृधे खरादीन् संरक्षितां त्वामिव लक्ष्मणो मे ॥

See yonder there. I guess Bharata has been verily apprised by Hanuman of the good news of our return, which is the reason why the dear brother along with the army is rushing with warm zeal to greet me.

Just as Lakshmana restored you to me the other day duly well protected, when I returned after the beneficial slaughter in battle of Khara and others, so also, this saintly Bharata emaciated with austerities will restore the kingdom in fact to me who have carried out the word of my father.

असौ पुरस्कृत्य गुरुं पदातिः पश्चादवस्थापितवाहिनीकः ।
वृद्धैरमात्यैः सह चीरवासा मामर्घ्यपाणिर्भरतोऽभ्युपैति ॥

पित्रा विसृष्टां मदपेक्षया यः श्रियं युवाप्यङ्कगतामभोक्ता ।
इयन्ति वर्षाणि तया सहोग्रमभ्यस्यतीव व्रतमासिधारम् ॥

Ah ! What a delightful sight ! Clothed with the bark of a tree and with materials of oblations in his hand, look, Bharata approaches me on foot, the royal sage Vasishtha coming ahead of him and the army followed by the aged Ministers in rear.

Although younger, out of extreme reverence for me, he has spurned the RAJYA SRI (royal fortune) foisted on him by our dear father. It seems to me that he has all these years been practising with her the rigorous penance of the "Sword-edge". *(The feminine gender in the word (श्रियं) is suggestive of the picture of woman in whose company Bharata dexterously sticks to the onerous vow, i. e the austere culmination of controlling the senses in the very presence of overwhelming temptations.)*

The Pushpaka, gauging Rama's wishes and thought, descends from the aerial region gradually towards the greeting crowd of dazed citizens who have followed Bharata and it stops just above the ground. Vibhishana leads Rama to the flight of spatika (transparently crystal) steps in the Pushpaka car. The exile alights down from the vehicle clasping the hand of Sugriva. Then one by one gets down from the plane.

Raghava meets first the Kulaguru — the Great Vasishtha — and offers obeisance to him. Then he condescendingly accepts the august welcome given by Bharata. With tumul-

tuous joy Rama embraces his brother and smells him on his *forehead.*

The aged counsellors assembled there make their salutation to Rama, who, in turn, greets them with his elegant looks and graceful words of kind enquiries of their health.

Paying eloquent tributes to both Sugriva and Vibhishana, Rama introduces them to Bharata who salutes them respectfully. Then Kaikeyi's son bends his head low as he passes by Lakshmana. The latter lifts him up and gives him a warm embrace.

At the behest of Raghava, the Chiefs of the monkey hosts assume human forms and mount on lordly elephants. Vibhishana and his retinue get into the beautifully designed chariots earmarked for them.

Along with Sita and his brothers, Rama takes back his seat in the Pushpaka with its fluttering flags. Bharata lies prostrate *reverently before* the blessed feet of his brother's wife

लङ्केश्वरप्रणतिभङ्गदृढव्रतं तद्वन्द्यं युगं चरणयोर्जनकात्मजायाः ।
ज्येष्ठानुवृत्तिजटिलं च शिरोऽस्य साधोरन्योन्यपावनमभूदुभयं समेत्य ॥

The adorable feet of Janaki, which have defiantly repudiated the blind overtures of Ravana, sticken with frantic love, and the head of the saintly Bharata with matted hair — both coming together — become mutually sanctifying.

The car moves slowly on the ground making its way towards Nandigrama and reaches the splendid garden there.

उभावुभाभ्यां प्रणतौ हतारी यथाक्रमं विक्रमशोभिनौ तौ ।
विस्पष्टमस्रान्धतया न दृष्टौ ज्ञातौ सुतस्पर्शसुखोपलम्भात् ॥

On arrival, the two heroic sons, Rama and Lakshmana, are fondly welcomed by the Queen-mothers Kausalya and Sumitra, *who bear a sad mien, having lost* their husband. The brothers bow down *to their mothers in high* reverence On seeing the sons, mingled tears of joy and grief well up in

the mothers' eyes and trickle down their cheeks. Owing to their bleary eyes, they fail to perceive their sons physically. But the exhilarating sensation of the tactile touch of the sons make them conscious of their sons' presence.

ते पुत्रयोर्निर्ऋतशस्त्रमार्गानार्द्रानिवाङ्गे सदयं स्पृशन्त्यौ।
अपीप्सितं क्षत्रकुलाङ्गनानां न वीरसूशब्दमकामयेताम् ॥

The mothers give a tenderly touch on their sons' bodies. But, as they feel the marks of fresh wounds caused by the enemies' weapons, they at once abandon their desire to gain for themselves the acclamation of 'a hero's mother', usually sought for by the ladies of Kshatriya family.

[The endearing idealism of Kshatriya women desiring the honorific title 'mother of a hero' is a pointer to the charms of chivalry coursing through their hearts just as the Spartan mothers felt for their sons fighting under Leonidas "Come with thy shield or on thy shield". But the mothers, Kausalya and Sumitra, present a striking contrast as their hands course through the fresh wounds of their sons. The poet's imagination indeed excels here.]

Sita approaches the two Queens and pays her homage. In a lightning flash crowd in her memory the various poignant mishaps that have befallen the Royal household since her arrival in their house The exile of Rama, the lamentable death of Dasaratha, the harrowing sufferings of her husband in the woods — all these sunder her heart and plunge her in low spirits. With these gloomy thoughts does she bend low before the two mothers, saying:

'क्लेशावहा भर्तुरलक्षणाहं सीतेति नाम स्वमुदीरयन्ती'

"The inauspicious Sita, I am, the harbinger of woes to my husband."

Kausalya and Sumitra console her and applaud her chastity and her virtuous stand in perplexing situation. This lofty virtue alone has saved her husband's fair name.

Preparations are now afoot for Rama's coronation. The venerable Vasishtha and other Ministers issue orders for bringing waters from the holy places for the blessed occasion. The Chiefs of demons and monkeys with amazing speed fetch in golden jars the sacred waters from the famous rivers, lakes and seas

At the stroke of auspicious hour, amidst the resonant chantings of Vedic Hymns, Vasishtha and other revered Ministers pour on Rama the various collected sacred waters and instal him as the King of Ayodhya with magnificent pomp and splendour.

(Mark the significant deviation here from the story of Valmeeki, where Rama is crowned, not in the outskirts of the City but in Ayodhya itself)

तपस्विवेषक्रिययापि तावत् यः प्रेक्षणीयः सुतरां बभूव ।
राजेन्द्रनेपथ्यविधानशोभा तस्योदितासीत् पुनरुक्तदोषा ॥

Rama is adorned with royal ornaments Even in a mendicant's apparel, he is gracefully attractive. To say that his comeliness in regal robes increases is susceptible of tautology.

The Capital is festively and gorgeously decorated. Triumphant welcome arches with hanging wreaths of flowers are erected on the royal paths. Auspicious sounds of the blaring of the trumpets ravishingly echo all over the place and the citizens are thrilled with joy. With acclamations of 'Victory' the eldest Prince enters the city, seated with Sita in a chariot. On either side of him stand the two brothers Lakshmana and Satrughna, and fan him gently by a pair of chamaras, while Bharata holds the royal sun-shade over his head. Rama and his brothers appear to be the conglomeration of the four weapons in the armoury of politics — साम, दान, दण्ड, and भेद. The Ministers, demons and monkeys follow Rama in rapturous joy. The happy citizens shower on him the auspicious fried rice. The ladies greet Sita affectionately with folded hands as she passes by.

[The major important incidents in Ramayana which the Poet has taken liberty to omit in his twelfth canto find a happy enumeration in the thirteenth, of course barring a few ones like Sabari's and Bharadwaja's. Kalidasa portrays picturesquely the grand ocean, the great Maharshis of the Dandaka forest and holy rivers — Ganga, Yamuna and Sarayu — and the descriptions are very enchanting.)

CHAPTER XIX — THE CALUMNY ON SITA

Rama assigns luxuriously furnished quarters to his friends who have accompanied him all the way to Ayodhya.

He enters his father's palace and the moment he sees the latter's portrait adorning the wall, tears copiously shed from his bleary eyes. He meets the grief-stricken Kaikeyi who is rather ashamed and so feels embarrassed to see him. But the noble-hearted prince allays her mental anguish, and with folded palms, says :

कृताञ्जलिस्तत्र यदम्ब सत्यान्नाभ्रश्यत स्वर्गफलाद्गुरुर्नः ।
तच्चिन्त्यमानं सुकृत तवेति जहार लज्जां भरतस्य मातुः ॥

'Oh mother ! Our respected Sire did not detract from that moral plane of truthfulness, the attainment of which has conferred on him the heavenly bliss When considered, this culmination is indeed on account of your benevolent but sagacious deed.'

Raghava entertains his guests on a magnificently lavish scale with contrived enjoyments. Sugriva, Vibhishana and others who possess such divine Siddhis that they could achieve the fulfilment of their wishes by the mere thought thereon, are amazed at the elaborate arrangements made for them. In their view, the Capital presents the picture of a veritable wonderland.

Many a heavenly sage has come to felicitate Rama on his coronation. The revered seers wax eloquent on the biographical anecdotes and on the prowess of Ravana, the formidable foe. This recapitulation is obliquely a hymn of praise of Rama's scintillating valour. In immense appreciation, the King honours them grandly. The monkey-lords

and the Rakshasa-chiefs, spend a pleasurable fortnight being looked after personally by the King and the Queen before they return to their headquarters. The Pushpaka plane too is sent back to Kubera, its owner.

Rama's glorious reign commences. His affection for his three brothers is uniform and ■ devoted uniformly to all his mothers. (*Kalidasa highlights the dedicated and benign rule of Rama in a single charming verse.*)

तेनार्थवांल्लोभपराङ्मुखेन तेन घ्नता विघ्नभयं क्रियावान् ।
तेनास लोकः पितृमान् विनेत्रा तेनैव शोकापनुदेन पुत्री ॥

Rama is not covetous; hence the people are rich and prosperous. The monarch removes the cause of their fears with the result that they perform the duties ordained for them. The ruler is looked upon by his subjects as a patriarch because of his impartial and benevolent reign. The King dispels their miseries and brings them happiness; so they find in him a dutiful son.

A picture-gallery is set up with the various paintings ■f scenes depicting their life in the wilds of Dandaka. Sita and her husband feast their eyes on the reminiscent paintings, with great joy.

Thus spends Rama many many happy days in the sweet company of his beautiful Queen.

Sita exhibits signs of pregnancy. Her bright eyes and pale face gladden Rama's heart. He makes loving enquiries of her longings.

Sita pours out her wishes at once. The recent visit of hers to the picture-gallery reminds her of the good old days spent on the banks of the Ganga. Her heart yearns to see once again the grassy penance groves and renew her acquaintance with the daughters of the pious hermits there. Rama readily accedes to her desire.

ऋद्धापणं राजपथं स पश्यन् विगाह्यमानां सरयूं च नौभिः ।
विलासिभिश्चाध्युषितानि पौरैः पुरोपकण्ठोपवनानि रेमे

One day along with his darling Queen he ascends his palace, a sky-scraper, and gives her an aerial view of the prosperous metropolis. The Kingsway flourishes with its rich markets. The river Sarayu is ever busy with ocean-going ships. The natural lungs of the city's suburbs are thronged with the belles and their fiances. This landscape pompously delights the King.

As is usual, Rama sends a spy to gather the 'talks of the city' about him, his brothers and the royal family. Bhadra, the trusted spy, returns but with an unwelcome news.

निर्बन्धपृष्टः स जगाद सर्वं स्तुवन्ति पौराश्चरितं त्वदीयम् ।
अन्यत्र रक्षोभवनोषितायाः परिग्रहान्मानवदेव देव्याः ॥

The spy announces 'good news as usual.' Rama takes it as routine and perfunctory and presses for additional news. The King notices a sudden gloomy grimace in Bhadra's face. When persistently and sternly enquired, the spy, in a tremulous and husky voice, says:

"Oh Lord of men ! The citizens praise the entire conduct of yours but they do not approve of your action in having taken back the Queen who had dwelt in the house of the wicked Rakshasa." Rama is stunned and stupefied to hear this narration. The words of scandal about Sita sunder his heart and plunge him in utter sorrow.

किमात्मनिर्वादकथामुपेक्षे जायामदोषामुत संत्यजामि ।
इत्येकपक्षाश्रयविक्लवत्वादासीत् स दोलाचलचित्तवृत्तिः ॥

"Am I to be impervious to the public opinion about me or am I to repudiate my wedded wife whom I know to be innocent ?" — thus assailed as to which of the course he should adopt, Rama's perplexed mind swings like a pendulum

Rama communes alone. 'To abandon Sita is the only course left to wipe out the baseless blot on me' decides he. Verily, for those to whom unsullied honour is the cherished

goal, honour is worthier than their own self. (यशोधनानां हि यशो गरीयः)

He sends for his younger brothers at once to acquaint them with his decision. The moment they see his agitated face, they are taken aback. Rama lets them know the public talk on the alleged slur of Sita and tortures their ears with his drastic and cruel decision too.

तदेष सर्गः करुणार्द्रचित्तैर्न मे भवद्भिः प्रतिषेधनीयः ।
यद्यर्थिता निर्हृतवाच्यशल्यान्प्राणान्मया धारयितुं चिरं वः ॥

He addresses them :

"This is my firm resolve. Though your minds thaw with compassion you should not stand between me and my decision if at all you desire that I should live long, freed from the darts of censure."

[This verse is suggestive of Kalidasa's repudiation of the charge that he is good only at depicting 'Sringara Rasa' (love) and knows not the portrayal of 'Karuna Rasa' (pathos). This sarga (Chapter XIV) is replete with 'pathos'. It seems as if the poet, punning on the words — Sarga and Karuna— directs this verse towards his critics.]

Alas ! None of the brothers dares to say 'yes' or 'no' to the eldest's pre-determined view. Rama calls his brother Lakshmana and whispers in his ears:

प्रजावती दोहदशंसिनी ते तपोवनेषु स्पृहयालुरेव ।
स त्वं रथी तद्व्यपदेशनेयां प्रापय्य वाल्मीकिपदं त्यजैनाम् ॥

'Your sister-in-law has a longing to see the peaceful groves on the banks of the Ganga. With this pretext, you take her away in a chariot to Sage Valmeeki's retreat and leave her there."

Lakshmana calls back to his mind the poignant precedent of Parasurama carrying out his father's commands by severing his mother's head. Likewise, he submits to his brother's orders

आज्ञा गुरूणां ह्यविचारणीया

The command of the elders should never be questioned but acted upon.

The daughter of Janaka gets ready to leave for the banks of the Ganga. Seated in a chariot she joyfully sets off with her brother-in-law.

सा नीयमाना रुचिरान् प्रदेशान्प्रियंकरो मे प्रिय इत्यनन्दत् ।
नाबुद्ध कल्पद्रुमतां विहाय जातं तमात्मन्यसिपत्रवृक्षम् ॥

As the guileless Queen passes the pleasant country scenery-spots, she thinks her beloved has done her good. She *hardly knows that her husband is to her no more* a *wish-*yielding tree but a tree of razor-edged leaves.

Sita suddenly feels the throbbing of her right eye, indicating some evil befalling her soon. Frightened at the ill-omen, she is seized with the fear for the safety of Rama and his brothers! She then prays for their weal.

Lakshmana reaches the banks of the river where he has to do the heartless deed. He casts a glance over the Ganga waters The mother Ganga seems as if imploring him with her wafting waves not to perpetrate the blackest sin of deserting a poor innocent enceinte lady.

अवार्यतेवोत्थितवीचिहस्तैः जह्नोः दुहित्रा स्थितया पुरस्तात् ॥*

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*Readers will be struck with the illuminating imagery of the Poet.

CHAPTER XX — SITA'S NOBLE MESSAGE

Sumantra reins the steeds of the chariot on the alluvion of the Ganga. Lakshmana requests Sita to get down and both seat themselves in a comfortable boat brought by a forester there.

Ever dedicated to carry out implicitly his elder's command, however painful and poignant it may be, the son of Sumitra crosses to the other bank along with his sister-in-law, as a truthful person is wedded to stand by his solemn promise. He steels his heart to do the heartless job thrust on him by his elder brother. His throat is choked with tears inside. With great effort does he maintain his equanimity and manage to articulate the heart-rending orders.

Ah! What a hypnotising shock! What a terrible humiliation! What a writhing agony! The cruel and piercing words of Rama sunder Sita's heart and dash her to the ground unconscious, as a hailstorm sweeps off a creeper crushing its flowers. (It looks, the poet fancies, as if Sita seeks shelter in her mother, THE EARTH, the prime cause of her corporeal form.)

Sita is oblivious of her corroding anguish because of her unconsciousness. On Lakshmana bringing her to senses, her revival renews increasingly her agony.

न चावदद्भर्तुरवर्णमार्या निराकरिष्णोः वृजिनादृतेऽपि ।
आत्मानमेव स्थिरदुःखभाजं पुनः पुनः दुष्कृतिनं निनिन्द ॥

The dutiful Sita however condemns her own self which, she considers, must have sinned heinously. She does not reproach her husband for his heartless act of deserting her for no fault of hers.

Lakshmana assuages the virtuous Sita and directs her to sage Valmeeki's abode. The ever obedient younger prince prostrates before Sita and craves her pardon for his ignominious act in having, without demur, carried out the cruel behest of his elder brother. The generous Janaki blesses him and sends a pathetic but a dignified and noble message through him to Rama and to her mothers-in-law.

श्वश्रूजन सर्वमनुक्रमेण विज्ञापय प्रापितमत्प्रणामः ।
प्रजानिषेकं मयि वर्तमानं सूनोरनुध्यायत चेतसेति ॥

वाच्यस्त्वया मद्वचनात्स राजा वह्नौ विशुद्धामपि यत्समक्षम् ।
मां लोकवादश्रवणादहासीः श्रुतस्य किं तत्सदृशं कुलस्य ॥

कल्याणबुद्धेरथवा तवायं न कामचारो मयि शङ्कनीयः ।
ममैव जन्मान्तरपातकानां विपाकविस्फूर्जथुरप्रसह्यः ॥

उपस्थितां पूर्वमपास्य लक्ष्मीं वनं मया सार्धमसि प्रपन्नः ।
तदास्पदं प्राप्य तयातिरोषात् सोढास्मि न त्वद्भवने वसन्ती ॥

Convey in due order my reverential regards to my mothers-in-law. May they wish well of the foetus in me.

Pass on to the KING these words of mine :

"Just on hearing the gossip of the common people, does this become of you to banish me — me who have proved my hall mark of immaculate chastity in your august presence by going through the fire-ordeal ? Does this befit your renowned lineage ?

No. This act, I feel, is not wilfully done by you, for, I know you are of benevolent disposition. It is the natural outcome of my own sins committed in my past births.

Or it may be thus. Once when the 'Royal Glory' neared you, you relentlessly spurned her and left for the sylvan environs taking me along with you. Now 'She' has gained a firm hold on you and in her fury does not tolerate me living in your house.

[*What an exuberant flight of poetic fancy :*

Sita alludes to Rajya Lakshmi, her co-wife, prevailing on Rama to cast her off, because all the while the merciless abandon of her by Rama by going to the forest with Sita, has been assailing her flesh and corroding her lacerated heart]

निशाचरोपप्लुतभर्तृकाणां तपस्विनीनां भवतः प्रसादात् ।
भूत्वा शरण्या शरणार्थमन्यं कथं प्रपत्स्ये त्वयि दीप्यमाने ॥

Sita shudders to think that she has now to seek refuge in a hermit. The very thought is mordantly distressing to her. For, when her husband is potent and prosperous as ever, how could she approach another for protection ? Moreover, has she not been the source of succour to the hermit-ladies once when their husbands were harrassed by the nocturnal wanderers, *the demons ? She continues her pathetic* message ;

किं वा तवात्यन्तवियोगमोघे कुर्यामुपेक्षां हृतजीवितेऽस्मिन् ।
स्याद्रक्षणीयं यदि मे न तेजस्त्वदीयमन्तर्गतमन्तरायः ॥

साहं तपः सूर्यनिविष्टदृष्टिरूर्ध्वं प्रसूतेश्चरितुं यतिष्ये ।
भूयो यथा मे जननान्तरेऽपि त्वमेव भर्ता न च विप्रयोगः ॥

नृपस्य वर्णाश्रमपालनं यत् स एव धर्मो मनुना प्रणीतः ।
निर्वासिताप्येवमतस्त्वयाहं तपस्विसामान्यमवेक्षणीया ॥

Yes, I will certainly give up my wretched miserable life which is not worth living on account of perpetual separation from you. But the very spark of life in me through you — that of the child — inhibits me from resorting to this contemplated self-immolation. (*Sita lays bear her resolve.*)

Placed as I am, after the birth of the child, I shall endeavour to do penance with my eyes fixed on the sun so as to gain you—and you alone—as my husband in my next birth.

Bestow your care on me, though not as a wedded wife, atleast as one in common with the other ascetics. Is it not

the King's duty as enjoined by Manu to offer protection to all castes and creeds and preserve the ordered stages in life? (*Sita appeals to the King as one of his subjects.*)

As Janaki concludes her message, tears well up in her eyes and trickle down her cheeks and she weeps aloud Taking leave of her, Lakshmana departs. The forest atmosphere is dismally gloomy. The peacocks suddenly abandon their dance.

The trees shake their flowers. The fawns convulsively drop off the Kusa grass from their mouths. There is the excessively sympathetic lamentation even from nature.

नृत्यं मयूराः कुसुमानि वृक्षाः दर्भानुपात्तान् विजहुर्हरिण्यः ।
तस्याः प्रपन्ने समदुःखभावमत्यन्तमासीद्रुदितं वनेऽपि ॥

The poet-sage Valmeeki, who is then passing by, hears Sita's wails and frantically rushes to the spot. Wiping off her stream of tears, Sita pays obeisance to the revered Maharshi who, in turn, showers his blessings on her to beget good worthy sons. He cheers up the miserable lady and soothens her with the following words :

"Oh Videha Princess! Through meditation I know you have been cast away by your husband, excited by unfounded calumny. Grieve not. Think you have arrived at your father's abode.

उत्खातलोकत्रयकण्टकेऽपि सत्यप्रतिज्ञेऽप्यविकत्थनेऽपि ।
त्वां प्रत्यकस्मात्कलुषप्रवृत्तावस्त्येव मन्युर्भरताग्रजे मे ॥

तवोरुकीर्तिः श्वशुरः सखा मे सतां भवोच्छेदकरः पिता ते ।
धुरि स्थिता त्वं पतिदेवतानां किम् तन्न येनासि ममानुकम्प्या ॥

I am verily angry with that elder brother of Bharata (meaning Rama — Kalidasa significantly avoids the word 'Rama' as if the sage does not want to utter his name even) for his wrongful conduct towards you. May be he has rooted out the three-worlds' thorn (Ravana). May be he is

dedicated to truth. May be he is free from his self-conceit and vanity. Nonetheless, I am wroth with him.

Your father-in-law of great repute is a friend of mine; your father is indeed the liberator of the pious from this mundane world. You are the foremost among the women devoted to their husbands. What is there that is wanting in you so as to deprive you of my sympathy?

Fear not in this peaceful and beatific penance grove. Worry not. The purificatory rites on the birth of your child will be performed in this place.

Have your baths in the nearby Tamasa whose banks are studded with hermitages. Do your worship on the banks and you will regain your composure and serenity of mind.

These hermit-girls with their natural grace and sweet elegance of speech will fetch you the grains, fruits and flowers for your oblations. They will amuse you who are smitten with fresh misfortune.

Rear to capacity the tender plants in the hermitage of mine. You shall doubtess derive the pleasure of having a suckling child even before giving birth to a son."

Consoling thus the kind-hearted Valmeeki takes the woeful Sita to his own cottage and hands her over to the women there. The hermit daughters greet her with great cheer Sita starts leading an ascetic life.

अपि प्रभुः सानुशयोऽधुना स्यादित्युत्सुकः शक्रजितोऽपि हन्ता ।
शशंस सीतापरिदेवनान्तमनुष्ठितं शासनमग्रजाय ॥

"Would that I see Rama now given to penitence?"— so thinking Lakshmana returns and narrates to his brother all that has happened up to the end of Sita's lament.

Rama listlessly listens to the message conveyed by his brother. Tears flow down his cheeks. He has no doubt banished his wife physically but he pines for her; and thus is Sita ever present in his aching heart.

CHAPTER XXI — THE BENEVOLENT SOVEREIGN

Rama arrests his grief on account of the separation from his beloved. With his mind free from passion, the wise King discharges the royal duties vigilantly as ever in seeing that the performance, by the various castes, of their ordained modes of life is scrupulously kept up. He reigns his prosperous realm with his brothers.

सीता हित्वा दशमुखरिपुः नोपयेमे यदन्यां
तस्या एव प्रतिकृतिसखः यत् क्रतून् आजहार ।
वृत्तान्तेन श्रवणविषयप्रापिणा तेन भर्तुः
सा दुर्वारं कथमपि परित्यागदुःखं विषेहे ॥

Now the occasion arises for Rama to do the holy sacrifices. Such rites, he knows full well, could only be done in the company of the wedded wife. But, he gives up the very idea of marrying again. On the advice of the learned priests, he causes a gold statue of Sita to be made and keeps it by his side at the time of performing the rites. The happy news reaches Valmeeki's cottage and falls on Sita's ears also. It acts as an anodyne to alleviate her lacerated heart. She has no doubt been banished, but that her husband has tenaciously adhered to EKADARA VRATA (marrying only once in one's life) acts as a silver lining.

लवणेन विलुप्तेज्याः तामिस्रेण तमभ्ययुः ।
मुनयो यमुनाभाजः शरण्यं शरणार्थिनः ॥
अवेक्ष्य रामं ते तस्मिन् न प्रजह्रुः स्वतेजसा ।
त्राणाभावे हि शापास्त्राः कुर्वन्ति तपसो व्ययम् ॥

The peace-loving hermits who have their abodes on the banks of Yamuna are being unremittingly harassed by a cruel

Ogre LAVANA. The tormented sages approach Rama for succour and refuge. Capable as they are to destroy the demon by their very power to curse him, they wilfully desist from the display of the never-failing puissance of mystic saintliness and penance, for the naive reason that they have in Rama a protector. Only if there is none to grant them shelter, they permit themselves to have the painful luxury to expend their accumulated wealth of penance. They pray that Lavana be attacked only when he is without his TRIDENT (three-spiked spear) as, with it, he is well nigh invincible. Rama readily assures them of the removal of the impediment of their uninterrupted performance of their rituals.

धर्मसंरक्षणार्थैव प्रवृत्तिः भुवि शार्ङ्गिणः ।

Is it not for the laudable aim of preserving pristine righteousness that Lord Vishnu incarnates ?

Rama sends for Satrughna and instructs him to encounter the fiend and make short work of him. The younger brother reverently obeys and after receiving his elder's blessings, he sets out in a chariot with alacrity and with grim resolve towards Lavana's Capital. The sages lead him the way.

On his route, Satrughna spends a night in the sylvan retreat of Maharshi Valmeeki. The Muni magnificently honours the prince with the choicest bestowals from his mystic powers of penance.

तस्यामेवास्य यामिन्यां अन्तर्वत्नी प्रजावती ।
सुतावसूत संपन्नौ कोशदंडाविव क्षितिः ॥

As it happens, that very night the enceinte Sita is delivered of two effulgent sons just as the earth produces both—a rich bonanza and a well-trained perfect army of intense striking power. Her brother-in-law is highly elated at the good news. Early next morning he departs, bidding adieu to the sage.

Satrughna arrives at Madhupaghna, the Capital of Lavana. As he reaches the outskirts of the city, Lavana too returns with great zeal from the forest with the load of the kill.

धूमधूम्रो वसागन्धी ज्वलाबभ्रुशिरोरुहः ।
क्रव्याद्गणपरीवारः चिताग्निरिव जंगमः ॥

अपशूलं तमासाद्य लवणं लक्ष्मणानुजः ।
रुरोध संमुखीनो हि जयो रन्ध्रप्रहारिणाम् ॥

Grey like smoke, stinking with the smell of the marrow, with flame-like auburn hairs and girt with a host of rakshasas, the dreadful Lavana looks like a mobile blazing funeral pyre.

Alas ! the giant is now without his everpotent trident and Satrughna does not fail to seize the golden opportunity. The prince attacks the demon straightaway. Success readily *is assured to those who strike at the vulnerable points of the* enemy.

नातिपर्याप्तमालक्ष्य मत्कुक्षेरद्य भोजनम् ।
दिष्ट्या त्वमसि मे धात्रा भीतेनेवोपपादितः ॥

"The' grub for my belly is not fully sufficient today. Seeing this, I feel, the Creator, as if out of craven fear, has sent you for me"—so saying, Lavana uproots a tree full of flowers and intent on killing his enemy aims it at him. But before it could hardly reach the prince, it is pierced to innocuous pieces by his razor-sharp shafts. The maddeningly enraged Lavana lifts aloft a huge boulder and hurls it at his enemy. Ah ! What a wonder ! the rock is pulverized in no time.

वयसां पङ्क्तयः पेतुः हतस्योपरि विद्विषः ।
तत्प्रतिद्वन्द्विनो मूर्ध्नि दिव्याः कुसुमवृष्टयः ॥

With frantic fury, the fiend rushes towards Satrughna. The latter darts the divine Astra (of Vishnu) on the rakshasa and decimates him. Lavana is no more. Vultures and their ilk pounce on the corpse ; whereas showers of heavenly

flowers fall on the head of the victorious prince. The sages pay their gratitude to the brother of Rama and eulogise him copiously.

Satrughna founds the city of Madhura on the banks of the Yamuna and begins to reign. Under his benign rule, the citizens become increasingly prosperous. Madhura seems as if it is a city of Heaven on Earth.

स तौ कुशलवोन्मृष्टगर्भक्लेदौ तदास्यया ।
कविः कुशलवावेव चकार किल नामतः ॥
साङ्गं च वेदमध्याप्य किंचिदुत्क्रान्तशैशवौ ।
स्वकृतिं गापयामास कविप्रथमपद्धतिम् ॥

Valmeeki performs the rites attendant on the twin-sons of Sita. As the foetus defilement has been removed by Kusa grass and by the tuft of the cow's tail (LAVA), the sage-poet significantly christens them *Kusa* and *Lava*.

As soon as the boys pass off their 'infant' stage, Valmeeki imparts them the Vedic and the other kindred education. He teaches them also his own excellent composition, THE RAMAYANA, the first beacon light for all the future poets, and makes them rapturously sing it too.

When Kusa and Lava sing melodiously the 'Story of Rama' before their mother, Sita's agony of separation from her lord is mitigated considerably.

The other brothers of Rama — Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna also — have already become fathers of two sons each. Satrughna confers the Kingdoms of Madhura and Vidisa on his two sons, Satrughatin and Subahu. After a stay in Madhura for some time, Satrughna returns to Ayodhya. On his return journey he does not halt at Valmeeki's abode lest *he should be the cause for the disturbance* of the sage's penance. Amidst shouts of tumultuous welcome does the son of Sumitra enter the palace. He sees his brother who is in the assembly hall. As he offers obeisance to Rama, the latter congratulates him on his victory over the Ogre.

Satrughna announces happiness all over the corners of the kingdom. But in deference to the wishes of the sage Valmeeki, he does not inform Rama of the good news of the twin-sons to Sita. He is however sanguine that the Sage will restore them to the King at the opportune moment.

One day a brahmin citizen of Ayodhya frantically rushes to the palace-gate. With his dead child on his lap, he weeps piteously:

शोचनीयासि वसुधे या त्वं दशरथाच्च्युता ।
रामहस्तमनुप्राप्य कष्टात् कष्टतरं गता ॥

'Oh Mother Earth! You are to be deplored. Slipped off from Dasaratha and fallen into the hands of Rama, you have slipped from bad to worse. (The Poet's idea is — the first plight is to be cast away from the good ruler like Dasaratha and the second is falling into the hands of ruler like Rama.)

Rama feels abashed on hearing the Brahmin's wail. Premature death has never occurred in the realm of Ikshwaku lineage.

The King comforts the grief-stricken citizen and asks him to bear up for a while. Immediately he thinks of the aerial car, PUSHPAKA, which reaches him swiftly from the abode of Kubera. With the firm intention to conquer the God of Death, Rama gets into it. As the plane soars up, an impersonal voice speaks out before him:

राजन् प्रजासु ते कश्चिदपचारः प्रवर्तते ।
तमन्विष्य प्रशमयेः भवितासि ततः कृती ॥

'Oh King, there lurks a misdeed (violation of duties prescribed for the appropriate castes) amongst your subjects. Seek it and put it down. Then only you have done your duty.'

The moment Rama hears this speech, he resolves to root out the crime.

Pushpaka flies over all the directions. Rama locates a person doing penance, hanging from the bough of a tree with his face downwards and with eyes brown due to smoke. On being enquired, the smoke-inhaler declares himself as a Sudra — Sambuka by name — bent upon attaining the region of the gods.

Sambuka has no legal sanctity to perform the penance. This does not augur well for the subjects in the State. Rama concludes that he deserves to be beheaded. He takes the sword and severs his head. This very punishment by the King makes Sambuka attain the goal on which he has set his mind and for which he did the penance.

Rama chances to meet the great Maharshi Agastya who presents to him a lustrous jewel. Wearing it on his arm, the resplendent Rama returns to his Capital. What a wonder! The dead child of the Brahmin also returns to life as if from sleep.

CHAPTER XXII — RAMA RETURNS TO HIS ABODE

Rama's rule is hailed everywhere. The welfare of his subjects is his paramount concern. To meet their wishes, he does not hesitate to sacrifice even his own comforts and is ready to suffer self-mortification. This self-infliction has been the chiselled code of conduct for him. Merely based on the capricious talk of an ordinary citizen, has he not taken the extreme poignant step of banishing his wedded wife although he was quite convinced of her immaculate purity and impeccable innocence? By the removal of the Ogre Lavana, has he not granted protection to the sages on the Yamuna banks? The unrighteous Sambuka's deliberate violation of the religious injunction was traced and he was given chastisement which he richly deserved; thereby the Brahmin's child was saved from the untimely death. The people rejoice lavishly at their King's benevolent rule and 'Rama, Rama, Rama' are the words that are echoed all over the country.

तमध्वराय मुक्ताश्वं रक्षःकपिनरेश्वराः ।
मेघाः सस्यमिवाम्भोभिः अभ्यवर्षन् उपायनैः ॥

दिग्भ्यो निमन्त्रिताश्चैनमभिजग्मुः महर्षयः ।
न भौमान्येव धिष्ण्यानि हित्वा ज्योतिर्मयान्यपि ॥

विधेरधिकसम्भारः ततः प्रववृते मखः ।
आसन्यत्र क्रियाविघ्नाः राक्षसा एव रक्षिणः ॥

Rama performs the Asvamedha (horse) sacrifice and lets loose the 'hallowed' steed. Not only the neighbouring princes but also the chiefs of the rakshasas and the monkeys are invited. All of them respond to the invitation and shower presents on the Emperor. On this auspicious occasion, invi-

tations are sent too to the great sages. They leave their mundane and starry abodes and gather at Rama's sacrificial ground.

Rama here again keeps by his side the gold statue of his consort Sita during the sacrifice. This commendable devotion to his wife stirs all the invitees.

The sage Valmeeki has all along been awaiting a golden opportunity to effect the reunion of Sita with her husband. He has already taught the whole of his composition 'Ramayana' to her sons, Lava and Kusa. He directs the twin-pupils to sing his sublime poem in public. The two brothers accordingly go hither and thither chanting rapturously the verses.

अथ प्राचेतसोपज्ञं रामायणमितस्ततः ।
मैथिलेयौ कुशलवौ जगतुः गुरुचोदितौ ॥

वृत्तं रामस्य, वाल्मीकेः कृतिः, तौ किन्नरस्वनौ ।
किं तद् येन मनो हर्तुमलं स्यातां न शृण्वताम् ॥

रूपे गीते च माधुर्यं तयोः तज्ज्ञैः निवेदितम् ।
ददर्श सानुजो रामः शुश्राव च कुतूहली ॥

तद्गीतश्रवणैकाग्रा संसदश्रुमुखी बभौ ॥

वयोवेषविसंवादि रामस्य च तयोस्तदा ।
जनता प्रेक्ष्य सादृश्यं नाक्षिकम्पं व्यतिष्ठत ॥

What a worthy theme! The story they sing centres round the glorious life of Rama, the Emperor. The composition is that of the poet-sage Valmeeki. The two singers are gifted with the voice of the Kinnaras (heavenly bards). What is it that is left desired in the two as not to win the hearts of the hearers?

As they proceed from place to place, they reach the city of Ayodhya. The Asvamedha sacrifice is in the process. In the very presence of those assembled, the comely boys start singing 'Ramayana'. All listen to the chorus singing with ecstasy. Rama is no exception too and he weeps for joy.

The charm and elegance of their form, the sweet cadences of their music, the poise and dignity of the poem — all hypnotise the royal brothers. They are benumbed with attention and admiration. The listlessly listening assembly is dazed and tears of joy well up in their eyes and trickle down their cheeks.

The assembled populace behold the striking resemblance in all but in age and dress, between Rama and the stripling lads. They stand stunned and stupefied.

The delighted Rama showers presents on the boys. But to the great surprise of all, the latter stoutly decline the offer. (For, have they not been brought up by the sage as austere dwellers in the woods? They are not beguiled by the naive offers of rewards. The lure of lucre is admiringly absent in them).

The dazed Rama enquires them endearingly :

गेये को नु विनेता वां कस्य चेयं कृतिः कवेः ।
इति राज्ञा स्वय पृष्टौ तौ वाल्मीकिमशंसताम् ॥

"Who has taught you this musical note ? Who is the poet that has composed this rapturous work ?". Out comes the reply in an instant — 'SAGE VALMEEKI'. Along with his brothers, Rama impulsively hastens to the sage's abode and readily offers him his entire kingdom.

"These two are Sita's sons, born of you" — so imploringly the compassionate poet-sage solicits Rama for the ready acceptance of Sita.

Rama addresses the sage :

तात शुद्धा समक्षं नः स्नुषा ते जातवेदसि ।
दौरात्म्यात् रक्षसः तां तु नात्रत्याः श्रद्दधुः प्रजाः ॥

'Oh Sire, Your daughter-in-law has proved her chastity by undergoing the fire-ordeal in our presence. But the people here deem her innocence as apocryphal and cast a doubt on her spotless purity because of the celebrated depravity of the demon.

Let Maithili inspire confidence in the minds of the doubting people of Ayodhya. Then, by your command, I shall acknowledge her back with her sons.

Immediately Valmeeki asks his pupils to bring Sita from his cottage.

The next day Rama summons the entire citizens to witness what he has decided. Accompanied by Sita and her two illustrious sons, the sage calls on Rama as he would, on the resplendent Sun-God, with the Vedic Hymn recited in correct intonation and with grammatical exactitude.

स्वरसंस्कारवत्यासौ पुत्राभ्यामथ सीतया ।
ऋचेवोदर्चिषं सूर्यं रामं मुनिरुपस्थितः ॥

[*We have a striking simile here. Valmeeki, is compared to the 'Upasaka'; Sita to the 'Vedic Hymn', the twins to 'Swara and Samskara'; and Rama to 'Sun-God'. The trained eyes of the literary mind will discern Kalidasa's reference to the divinity of Rama.*]

Clad in ochre robes, Sita enters the hall with her eyes fixed at her feet. Her serene form itself makes one conclude that she is pure. Suddenly taking their eyes away from the range of her sight, the people stand there with their heads bent down. (This action of theirs seems to suggest that they are still unconvinced of the innocence of Sita.)

Valmeeki takes a seat and casts his eyes all around. Turning to Sita, he orders :

कुरु निःसंशयं वत्से स्ववृत्ते लोकमित्यशात् ॥

'Child, free the people of all doubts of your conduct'.

Sipping the holy water poured out by the sage's pupil, with ringing sincerity Sita spoke with elegance and grace :

वाङ्मनःकर्मभिः पत्यौ व्यभिचारो यथा न मे ।
तथा विश्वंभरे देवि मामन्तर्धातुमर्हसि ॥

सा सीतामङ्कमारोप्य भर्तृप्रणिहितेक्षणाम् ।
मा मेति व्याहरत्येव तस्मिन् पातालमभ्यगात् ॥

'If I am not unfaithful in word, thought or deed to my Lord, Oh Mother ! take me unto Thee.'

No sooner does immaculate Sita utter these words, than there flashes a dazzling light from the earth's fissure as if a lightning does Up rises Mother Earth with the halo of lustre in a sentient form, seated on a throne supported by the hoods of serpent lords and girdled by seas. Placing on her lap Sita whose eyes are fixed at her husband, the Mother delves deep into the Nether world when Rama is yet lamentably shouting "Don't, don't."

Rama takes it ill. In his very presence, his wife is being snatched away. His fury towards 'Mother Earth' is intense. Anxious to retrieve Sita from her fold, he takes his bow ready to strike at the 'Earth'. But the sage Valmeeki who knows that relentless destiny is all powerful consoles Rama.

The sacrifice now concludes. The sages and friends are suitably honoured and sent back. Rama centres the affection he had for Sita, on her sons.

Rama makes over the country of 'SINDHU' to his brother, Bharata. The denizens there — the Gandharvas (who *are singers of Heaven)* — raise their arms against the new King but the latter subdues them. He makes them take the lute in their hands (their hereditary profession) and forgo their warlike weapons.

Thereafter, Bharata anoints his two sons — Taksha and Pushkala—in the two towns named after them and returns to *Ayodhya*.

Lakshmana too establishes his two sons — Angada and Chandraketu — as the rulers of Karapatha.

The three aged Queen-mothers—Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra—pass away and the four brothers perform their obsequies.

The time for Rama to quit the mortal world has come. The God of death under the guise of a 'sage' approaches him. The visitor puts the condition that whoever beholds them during their conversation should be abandoned by the King. Rama agrees. Lakshmana is ordered to guard at the door.

The 'sage' discloses his identity and conveys Brahma's behest that Rama should return to his cosmic abode.

To the dismay of Lakshmana, Durvasa Muni arrives at the gate and expresses his immediate wish to meet the monarch then and there. Lakshmana is in fix. He is unequivocally aware of the perilous condition and the dire consequence if he were to interrupt the private talks between the King and the earlier visitor. On the other hand, he is also aware that the irate Muni would not hesitate to curse if he is denied the entrance. But Lakshmana prefers the former course to the latter. He enters the chamber to announce to his brother of the arrival of the sage Durvasa. Alas! What a pity! The very moment Rama discards Lakshmana. The forlorn Lakshmana feels that there is no purpose in living in this earth, once he is separated from his brother. So he goes straight to river Sarayu and drowns himself.

Rama also gets ready to leave the world. The purpose of his coming here is over. He installs his sons Kusa in Kusavati and Lava in Saravati. He lets the people know of his decision to throw himself into the River Sarayu and to cast off his mortal coil.

His brothers, people and friends also will not bear the agony of separation from such a noble King. As he starts from the palace to have a fatal plunge into the holy River, they follow him too in fatal end. The hallowed spot is thence known as Gopratara.

निर्वर्त्यैवं दशमुखशिरश्छेदकार्यं सुराणां
विष्वक्सेनः स्वतनुमविशत् सर्वलोकप्रतिष्ठाम् ।
लङ्कानाथं पवनतनयं चोभयं स्थापयित्वा
कीर्तिस्तम्भद्वयमिव गिरौ दक्षिणे चोत्तरे च ॥

Rama fashions a separate Heaven for his followers to abide. He integrates himself with his cosmic form of VISHNU.

Rama has, however, erected two human monumental pillars of victory — one in the North and one in the South — HANUMAN in the Himalayan range and VIBHISHANA in the Trikuta mount. Are they not Chirajivins — those who have conquered death ?

CHAPTER XXIII — AYODHYA AGAIN IN REGAL SPLENDOUR

Kusa, the eldest son of Rama, possesses attractive and desirable virtues. The other seven princes—Lava, Takshaka, Pushkara, Angada, Chandraketu, Satrughati and Subahu — all show between themselves mutual esteem and affection. They evince great regard for Kusa and with equal determination instal him on Rama's throne. They present exultingly to the King the choicest and the most delectable mementos ; for, good fraternal feeling is their family trait.

Each of the territories assigned to the brothers is surcharged with prosperity. Dams and embankments are constructed for purposes of better irrigation. Agriculture profusely proliferates. The cattle wealth of the tillers is increasingly buoyed. Catching and taming of wild elephants has been pursued as a fine art and the tamed elephants form many regiments of the already invincible army. The lust for military glory by extending their frontiers is conspicuously absent in the princes. Kusa rules from Kusavati.

Ayodhya is now deserted. The rulerless city presents a sad pitiable sight.

अयार्घरात्रे स्तिमितप्रदीपे शय्यागृहे सुप्तजने प्रबुद्धः ।
कुशः प्रवासस्थकलत्रवेषां अदृष्टपूर्वां वनितामपश्यत् ॥

It is past midnight. Kusa is restless in his bed and sleep has deserted him. The lights are burning steadily. But his servants are all fast asleep. Suddenly he sees before him in flesh and blood a female stranger, dressed like one whose husband is living farther away.

The visitor folding her palms hails 'Victory' to the King. Kusa is taken by surprise to see her in, as the bolts of the doors remain firmly secured. Reclining on the bed but stretching aloft the upper body, he makes solicitous enquiries of her :

लब्धान्तरा सावरणेऽपि गेहे योगप्रभावो न च लक्ष्यते ते ।
विभर्षि चाकारमनिर्वृतानां मृणालिनी हैममिवोपरागम् ॥
का त्वं शुभे कस्य परिग्रहो वा किं वा मदभ्यागमकारणं ते ।
आचक्ष्व मत्वा वशिनां रघूणां मनः परस्त्रीविमुखप्रवृत्ति ॥

"Oh, virtuous lady ! You have gained access to the room even when the doors are closed. But no mystic power is seen in you. As a lotus blighted by frost, you appear as one in a forlorn state.

Who are you ? Who is your consort ? Lay bare the mission of your visit. But keep it in mind that the scions of Raghu's race cannot be assailed by overtures of others' wives "

The visitor replies :

"Know me as the Guardian Angel of the City of Ayodhya.

The day your revered Sire left for his celestial abode, he took away with him one and all—his brothers, his friends and the citizens too. No one lives in my city. Not only am I bereft of my Lord, the entire capital is now deserted

When the rulers of your race reigned, the city of Ayodhya flourished and prospered ; and lo ! when you are the ruler now, the city is now plunged in gloom

The roofs of the mansions and the open terraces have deep cracks and are now therefore dilapidated. The rampart walls have all tumbled down.

The once beautiful royal path luminous in nights with gaily maidens is at present the abode of yelping jackals and wolves. The swimming pools — the former resort of the

love-lorn sportive ladies — are now infested with wild bisons. The dancing peacock-pets are regretfully no more to be seen

On the stairways which used to bear the pink and graceful footprints of lovely women, one sees only the gruesome pads of the tiger's bloodstained paws. The garden creepers are being destroyed by the monkeys.

चित्रद्विपाः पद्मवनावतीर्णाः करेणुभिर्दत्तमृणालभङ्गाः ।
नखाङ्कुशाघातविभिन्नकुम्भाः संरब्धसिंहप्रहृतं वहन्ति ॥

स्तम्भेषु योषित्प्रतियातनानां उत्क्रान्तवर्णक्रमधूसराणाम् ।
स्तनोत्तरीयाणि भवन्ति सङ्गात् निर्मोकपट्टाः फणिभिर्विमुक्ताः ॥

रात्रावनाविष्कृतदीपभासः कान्तामुखश्रीवियुता दिवापि ।
तिरस्क्रियन्ते कृमितन्तुजालैः विच्छिन्नधूमप्रसरा गवाक्षाः ॥

बलिक्रियावर्जितसैकतानि स्नानीयसंसर्गमनाप्नुवन्ति ।
उपान्तवानीरगृहाणि दृष्ट्वा शून्यानि दूये सरयूजलानि ॥

"Wall-painted elephants in lotus-brooks,
Receiving each a lily from his mate,
Are torn and gashed, as if by cruel hooks,
By claws of lions, showing furious hate.

"I see my pillared caryatides
Neglected, weathered, stained by passing time.
Wearing in place of garments that should please,
The skins of sloughing cobras, foul with slime.

"The windows are not lit by lamps at night,
Nor by fair faces shining in the day,
But webs of spiders dim the delicate, light
Smoke-tracery with one mere daub of grey,

"The river is deserted ; on the shore
No gaily bathing men and maidens leave
Food for the swans ; its reedy bowers no more
Are vocal ; seeing this, I can but grieve."

(Translation by Arthur W. Ryder)

The Angel implore's Kusa's immediate return to the *traditional Capital.*

Her heart-rending tale thaws the King and he yearns to go back to Ayodhya at once. As he assentingly nods, the Angel invites a graceful smile and goes out of sight.

The day dawns. Kusa announces his previous night vision to the Brahmins assembled in the audience hall. He hands over the territory of Kusavati to them and sets out with great alacrity for Ayodhya. After crossing the Vindhyas and the Ganga, he reaches the old Capital.

The King stations his army on the outskirts of the city. With the aid of skilled artisans, he renovates soon the deserted and dilapidated Ayodhya. The priests perform the various ordained rituals. Kusa enters then the palace amidst thunderous rejoicings and assigns befitting abodes to his Ministers and other retinues who have followed him.

Many days pass by. The Summer season sets in with full rigour.†

Kusa wishes to spend his time amorously in the company of his Queens in the crystal-clear waters of the Sarayu. He camps on the sandy banks of the river which is rid of the crocodiles for the King's sport. The beautiful ladies of the harem get into the waters with their armlets brushing against each other and with jingling anklets on their feet.

The King now sits in a boat and feasts sensuously his wandering eyes for a while on the absorbing sports of the comely women as they splash water against one another. Kusa descends from the boat with his lustrous pearl-necklace moving to and fro on his chest, and joins the alluring ladies in their amorous swimming contest. The King delights greatly as the women sprinkle coloured waters on him by

†The Poet's pen-picture of the season marks him out to be a matchless observer of nature.

means of golden syringes. He in their midst looks like Indra sporting with Apsara damsels in the heavenly Ganga.

Kusa is wearing as usual the victory-bestowing-bracelet which was granted to his father by sage Agastya and was in turn bequeathed to him along with the Kingdom. While he is playing in the waters, the ornament slips off and disappears in the deep waters. Having bathed to his heart's content, when he gets back to the camp, he finds to his consternation and dismay, that the bracelet is missing He orders at once the expert divers to retrieve the lost ornament. Their persevering efforts are of no avail. They humbly submit to the King :

कृतः प्रयत्नो न च देव लब्धं मग्नं पयस्याभरणोत्तमं ते ।
नागेन लौल्यात् कुमुदेन नूनं उपात्तमन्तह्रदवासिना तत् ॥

"Sire ! We have made valiant efforts. But we could not trace the lost bracelet. Perhaps out of zeal, that must have been taken by the Serpent Kumuda living in the deep pool below".

The enraged Kusa takes his bow and darts an arrow (the presiding deity of which is Garuda) down into the river, intent on killing the serpent. The missile plunges deep making the waters sunder into two halves. In a moment, out emerges of the waters the Serpent Kumuda along with a charming maiden ahead of him. The lost bracelet too shines in his palms. On beholding them, Kusa retracts his Garuda Astra With folded hands, Kumuda addresses the King :

अवैमि कार्यान्तरमानुषस्य विष्णोः सुताख्यामपरां तनुं त्वाम् ।
सोऽहं कथं नाम तवाचरेयं आराधनीयस्य धृतेर्विघातम् ॥

"Oh Lord ! I know you as the corporeal body having the name of the 'Son of Vishnu' — of that Vishnu who had incarnated in human form for a specific purpose. Thus recognising you, how dare I possibly act injurious to the happiness of one who is in every way worthy of respect and honour.

CHAPTER XXIV — KING ATITHI'S POLITICAL ACUMEN

Kusa begets a son whom he christens Atithi. The prince grows up; he is endowed with eclectic and winning personal traits. Soon he learns all the sciences taught as family lore and shines as an ornament to both his paternal and maternal lineages. On completion of his studies, he marries many a princess. Atithi matches his father in all respects.

Once Indra, the Lord of the Gods, implores Kusa's assistance in his struggle with the demon, Durjaya. Kusa no doubt slays the rakshasa, but he meets his end. The sad news reaches the Capital and when the Queen Kumudvati hears of it, she gives up her life too and follows her husband to the Heaven.

पुरोहितपुरोगास्तं जिष्णुं जैत्रैरथर्वभिः ।
उपचक्रमिरे पूर्वमभिषेक्तुं द्विजातयः ॥
तस्यौघमहती मूर्ध्नि निपतन्ती व्यरोचत ।
सशब्दमभिषेकश्रीर्गङ्गेव त्रिपुरद्विषः ॥

The Ministers make preparations for Atithi's Coronation. A beautiful pavilion with four supporting pillars in the four corners is erected by the artisans for the anointing ceremony. The State Officers wait on the Prince who is seated on an auspicious seat, with holy waters in gold jars in their hands. Rapturous music and the blare of trumpets and the beating of drums endurably rend the air. Amidst chantings of hymns of Atharva Veda, the Brahmanas, headed by the royal priest, pour on the Prince the sacred waters which, as they fall on him, resemble Ganga falling on the head of Lord

This young sister of mine—KUMUDVATI—as she was playing with the ball, saw the ornament of yours slipping down *and seized it out of curiosity. Here it is. She pines to* serve at your feet as if to atone for her fault. Pray acknowledge her too."

Kusa readily accedes to Kumuda's *request. Then amidst* matrimonial rites he marries Kumudvati. The blare of celestial trumpets is heard in all quarters and the clouds rain fragrant heavenly flowers on the newly weds.

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Siva. At the appointed hour, Atithi is installed on the throne of Ikshvakus. The auspicious timing of anointment presages happiness to the monarch.

The royal bards sing to the glory of the enthroned King. Enormous wealth and valuable presents are distributed amongst the Snatakas (students who have just completed their education and are about to enter the Grihastha life) and the learned, who shower blessings on the new ruler. The happy event is celebrated all over the country with all magnificent pomp and splendour.

वन्धच्छेदं स बद्धानां वधार्हाणामवध्यताम् ।
धुर्याणां च धुरो मोक्षमदोहं चादिशद्गवाम् ॥
क्रीडापतत्रिणोऽप्यस्य पञ्जरस्थाः शुकादयः ।
लब्धमोक्षास्तदादेशाद्यथेष्टगतयोऽभवन् ॥

As is done customarily on these occasions, the prisoners are shown amnesty and are set at liberty. The condemned criminals are reprieved The beasts of burden are released from the yoke. The milching cows are interdicted and their calves have their delicious and unencumbered fill.

The caged birds like popinjays too, kept for mirth and amusement, gain their freedom at the King's orders.

Atithi is gorgeously ornamented and decorated by the *valets-de-chambre*. Scents are sprinkled and sandal paste is strewn over his body. Strings of pearls and emeralds adorn his crown. Wearing garlands of fragrant flowers and silken printed garments, Atithi looks extremely beautiful. With a beaming smile ever in his face and with his graceful looks, he inspires confidence on his dependants.

स पुरं पुरुहूतश्रीः कल्पद्रुमनिभध्वजाम् ।
क्रममाणः चकार द्यां नागेनैरावतौजसा ॥

As the Sovereign, possessing Indra's majestic appearance, passes in a procession round the city, mounting on an Iravata-like elephant bedecked with huge banners resembling

Kalpaka trees, Ayodhya presents the very look of a Heaven on earth. The ladies in the mansions drink him with their lovely eagerly eyes as he marches on. The deities that are worshipped in the spacious temples in the Capital shower their Grace on the blessed King. The ruler's intolerable and marvellous prowess reaches the farthest corners of the land.

वसिष्ठस्य गुरोः मन्त्राः सायकास्तस्य धन्विनः ।
किं तत्साध्यं यदुभये साधयेयुर्न संगताः ॥

स धर्मस्थसखः शश्वदर्थिप्रत्यर्थिनां स्वयम् ।
ददर्श संशयच्छेद्यान् व्यवहारानतन्द्रितः ॥

What is that worthy covetous thing that could not be secured when the wise counsels of the royal preceptor Vasishtha and the never failing arrows of King Atithi, the skilled archer, stand together ?

Having conscientious and wise judges as his associates, the ever vigilant and benevolent ruler looks after personally the day-to-day administration of the State. With righteous perspicacity, he probes into doubtful litigations between the rivals — the plaintiffs and defendants.

He is benign, liberal and generous to a fault to his loyal servants, and gratifies their wishes. During his regime, the subjects grow more and more prosperous.

यदुवाच न तन्मिथ्या यद्ददौ न जहार तत् ।
सोऽभूद्भग्नव्रतः शत्रूनुद्धृत्य प्रतिरोपयन् ॥

वयोरूपविभूतीनामेकैकं मदकारणम् ।
तानि तस्मिन् समस्तानि न तस्योत्सिषिचे मनः ॥

Whatever he utters is seldom untrue ; what he gives once is never taken back. But in one aspect he is guilty, that is, in not sticking to what he has resolved to achieve in battle. *(The reader is struck with the charming idea here — the King solemny declares that he will destroy his enemy in battle ; but when he vanquishes him, his kind heart impels him to give the*

kingdom back to the fallen enemy. Thus he swerves from his solemn utterance.)

Each one—adolescence, comeliness and riches — is the justfiable cause for pride. But all these in the King (even when combined) do not stifle his mind nor intoxicate him.

Thus by his just and beneficent rule, he wins the hearts of his people who evince high regard and respect for him.

None of Atithi's foes is ever disposed to be permanently hostile to him. They are at a distance. He therefore overpowers the six enemies inherent in his body — काम, क्रोध, लोभ, मद, मोह and मात्सर्य. (*The King has thus conquered his senses.*)

The Goddess of Wealth is by temperament fickle-minded. But in the mighty Atithi she stays constant just as streak of gold is ever present on the touch stone.

कातर्यं केवला नीतिः शौर्यं श्वापदचेष्टितम् ।
अतः सिद्धिं समेताभ्यां उभाभ्यामन्वियेष सः ॥

मन्त्रः प्रतिदिनं तस्य बभूव सह मन्त्रिभिः ।
स जातु सेव्यमानोऽपि गुप्तद्वारो न सूच्यते ॥

परेषु स्वेषु च क्षिप्तैः अविज्ञातपरस्परैः ।
सोऽपसर्पैर्जजागार यथाकालं स्वपन्नपि ॥
अपथेन प्रववृते न जातूपचितोऽपि सः ॥

Politics without prowess is deemed as craven fear. Courage bereft of politics is stark brutality. Hence he sought achievement by a happy blend of both.

There is not a single thing that has not been brought to the ruler's notice as he employs spies all over his kingdom.

Whatever duties have been enjoined for the Kings both during day and night, Atithi does them with unswerving resolve.

He consults his Ministers every day. Though held frequently, the proceedings of such meetings remain guarded as ever.

He goes to bed at the proper time. All the same he is ever wide-awake, in that he sees through his other eyes, namely SPIES *who are sent amongst his enemies as well as his* own partisans, one spy not having the knowledge of the presence of the other.

Atithi keeps his enemies in subjugation and his fortress is seldom besieged.

His undertakings have prosperity as their goal. Because of their being frequently looked after well, they are rid of the danger enveloping them.

The monarch has plenty of riches but pelf does not plunge him in evil ways. He is powerful but power does not intoxicate him.

No doubt Atithi is capable of suppressing even the perilous disaffection among his subjects ; but he does not at all give any room for such disaffection that seeks a spontaneous remedy.

He is blessed with matchless power—Prabhu, Mantra and Utsaha Saktis (overlordship, sagacity and enthusiasm). But he wages war only against those whom he can overwhelm, as the wild fire though wafted by wind does not direct itself to consume water.

न धर्ममर्थकामाभ्यां बबाधे न च तेन तौ ।
नार्थं कामेन कामं वा सोऽर्थेन सदृशः त्रिषु ॥
हीनान्यनुपकर्तृणि प्रवृद्धानि विकुर्वते ।
तेन मध्यमशक्तीनि मित्राणि स्थापितान्यतः ॥

In Dharma, Artha and Kama (virtue, wealth and pleasure)—the three cardinal aims of life, Kusa's son has no predilection for one at the cost of the other. Righteous conduct is never vitiated by his prosperity and enjoyment ;

nor the latter two are beguiled by the former. The same way wealth and sport are not mutually excluded.

Weaker friends are incapable of assistance; the stronger are prone to be hostile. So he keeps his friends in the mid-course.

परात्मनोः परिच्छिद्य शक्त्यादीनां बलाबलम् ।
ययौ एभिः बलिष्ठश्चेत् परस्मादास्त सोऽन्यथा ॥

The Sovereign plans his attack on his enemies after assessing the strength and weakness of their martial equipments and other sinews of war, and comparing them with his own. If he is stronger, he assails them; otherwise he remains quiet. All the while, he does not betray his own weak points.

He is solely obsessed with building up his treasure. Is it not wealth that draws one near? Only a cloud with water is greeted by Chataka birds.

Atithi takes care of his army as he does of his body.

During his reign, there is no depredations of marauders and dacoits. The caravans move freely unmolested in rivers, woods and mountains. The ascetics do their penance without obstructions.

The wealth is protected from the robbers. The people of the four castes adhere to their ordained duties

खनिभिः सुषुवे रत्नं क्षेत्रैः सस्यं वनैर्गजान् ।
दिदेश वेतनं तस्मै रक्षासदृशमेव भूः ॥

The well-ruled Earth gives reciprocal returns in the direct ratio of the benevolent reign—by way of diamonds from her mines, corns from her fields and elephants from her woods

Atithi adopts in due order the tetrad methods of Statecraft — Sama, Dama, Bheda and Danda — and gains an efficacious result of his six political expedients too (alliance, war, expedition, halt, seeking shelter and duplicity). Though

he is capable of a fraudulent warfare, he fights his enemies in a fair and equitable way.

The Goddess of Victory who always goes to a 'hero' singles him out, adopting the course of 'Abhisarika' towards him.*

The King presents wealth so lavishly to the poor that they in turn attain the status of 'donors' at once.

स्तूयमानः स जिह्राय स्तुत्यमेव समाचरन् ।
तथापि ववृधे तस्य तत्कारिद्वेषिणो यशः ॥

दुरितं दर्शनेन घ्नन् तत्वार्थेन नुदंस्तमः ।
प्रजाः स्वतन्त्रयांचक्रे शश्वत् सूर्य इवोदितः ॥

When he is hailed for his laudable acts, he is embarrassed with coy shame. The reputation of his as denouncer of sycophants accelerates his fame.

As the rising Sun removes sins and dispels darkness, the King too by his mere sight wards off the evils of his subjects and extirpates their ignorance. His rule makes them act with discretion and with freedom.

His delectably virtuous qualities evoke admiration even from his enemies.

Atithi performs an Aswamedha sacrifice as prescribed in the Sastras and is declared the Emperor.

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*अभिसारिकावृत्ति—'The conduct of a woman secretly going to her paramour'.

CHAPTER XXV — THE LASCIVIOUS AGNIVARNA

The art of Polity played by King Atithi enables him to win exalted fame and fair name. During his regime, people do not go without achieving their goal. Showers of rain are plenty everywhere and at the proper time. The country is not ravaged by any disease. The rivers are flowing to the brink and thus lessen the strenuous exertions of the oarsmen. In the treasury the coffers are full. All these — the poet remarkably fancies — look as if Indra (the causer of rains), Yama (the controller of diseases), Varuna (the lord of waters) and Kubera (The God of Wealth) — the respective Regents (Lokapalas) of the four quarters, East, South, West and North — are ever at his call and serve him too.

इन्द्रात् वृष्टिर्नियमितगदोद्रेकवृत्तिर्यमोऽभूत्
यादोनाथः शिवजलपथः कर्मणे नौचराणाम् ।
पूर्वापेक्षी तदनु विदधे कोपवृद्धिं कुबेरः
तस्मिन् दण्डोपनतचरितं भेजिरे लोकपालाः ॥

पञ्चमं लोकपालानां ऊचुः साधर्म्ययोगतः ।
भूतानां महता षष्ठमष्टमं कुलभूभृताम् ॥

By the striking identity of his actions with them, Atithi is verily proclaimed as the FIFTH Lokapala. Nay, he is even declared as the SIXTH Element and as the EIGHTH "Kula" mountain †

†Like the five elements — Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether — which are the root cause for bringing a material thing into existence, the monarch sees to it that whatever is essential for his subjects is produced and supplied to them without much trouble. Hence he is ranked amongst the elements. The Puranas say that the Earth is supported firmly by the seven mountains (Kulachalas). The Emperor also being in the real sense the supporter of the world is compared to a Kulachala.

Atithi's political reign is ever remembered in the history of the Kings of the Solar race.

In due course, the King crowns his son, Nishada, and departs for heaven. Nishada rules for a while and on his demise the Kingdom of Uttara Kosalas comes in turn under the sway of many celebrated Kings — Nala, Nabhas, Pundarika, Kshemadhanvan, Devanika, Ahinagu, Pariyatra, Sila, Unnabha, Vajranabha, Sankhana, Vyushitashwa, Vishwasaha, Hiranyanabha ; his son Kausalya, Brahmishta, Putra, Pushya and Dhruvasandhi.

मृते शिशावेव सुदर्शनाख्ये दर्शात्ययेन्दुप्रियदर्शने सः ।
मृगायताक्षो मृगयाविहारी सिंहादवापद्विपदं नृसिंहः ॥

Sudarsana is born to Dhruvasandhi. Like the moon, by his resplendent loveliness the princely child ecstatically delights the entire royal household. It so happens one day that his father who is deeply fond of 'Shikar' meets his end during his encounter with a lion. Dhruvasandhi's ministers ensure that the State is not without a ruler. They therefore at once *nem con* make the six-year old Prince — the only continuing link of the race — as the King of Ayodhya. His face beams with regal grandeur and the people give him the same respect as they for his father.

As years roll on, Sudarsana is endowed with many hereditary attractive and enduring traits. These fascinating qualities delight the hearts of his subjects.

न्यस्ताक्षरामक्षरभूमिकायां कार्त्स्न्येन गृह्णाति लिपिं न यावत्।
सर्वाणि तावत् श्रुतवृद्धयोगात् फलान्युपायुङ्क्त स दण्डनीतेः ॥

With his mastery of the three R's, the precocious boy acquires with amazing alacrity the skill of administering his kingdom in the company of aged Pandits.

Soon he gains acme of proficiency in the fields of Vedic lore, Political Economy and Statecraft. The Prince weds many a beautiful Princess and begets by one of them a son who becomes known as Agnivarna. Sudarsana instals him on

the throne and as is the custom of the Kings of Ikshvaku lineage, he leaves for the Naimisharanya to lead the life of a Vanaprastha.

तत्र तीर्थसलिलेन दीर्घिकाः तल्पमन्तरितभूमिभिः कुशैः ।
सौधवासमुटजेन विस्मृतः संचिकाय फलनिःस्पृहस्तपः ॥

The serene and peaceful hermitage situated in that forest, the green grounds covered by the holy Kusa grass all round and the sacred waters of the rivers that pass by, make him forget his former abode, his royal bed and the pleasure-ponds in his palace in Ayodhya He does his penance, all the while not aspiring for its fruit (Nishkama Karma).

सोऽधिकारमभिकः कुलोचितं काश्चन स्वयमवर्तयत्समाः ।
सन्निवेश्य सचिवेष्वतः परं स्त्रीविधेयनवयौवनोऽभवत् ॥

Agnivarna personally governs the kingdom for a while. Being a voluptuary by bent, he relegates his powers to his Ministers and plunges into the pleasures of youth and leads a life of dissipation and indolence in the company of amorous damsels

कामिनीसहचरस्य कामिनः तस्य वेश्मसु मृदङ्गनादिषु ।
ऋद्धिमन्तमधिकर्द्धिरुत्तरः पूर्वमुत्सवमपोहदुत्सवः ॥

The Palace echoes with melodious sounds of the beating drums of the concupiscent King. Each succeeding festivity outshines the previous one which by itself is grandiloquently gay and blithe.

इन्द्रियार्थपरिशून्यमक्षमः सोढुमेकमपि स क्षणान्तरम् ।
अन्तरेव विहरन्दिवानिशं न व्यपेक्षत समुत्सुकाः प्रजाः ॥

गौरवाद्यदपि जातु मन्त्रिणां दर्शनं प्रकृतिकाङ्क्षितं ददौ ।
तद्गवाक्षविवरावलम्बिना केवलेन चरणेन कल्पितम् ॥

Not being able to brook even the interval of a moment without the sensual enjoyment — basking himself night and day in amorous sports — Agnivarna is impervious to the weal of his subjects.

However, out of respect for his Ministers and also to assuage the keen desire of his citizens to have his 'darsan', the King obligingly holds out his foot hanging from the window. The loyal subjects pay their obeisance to it !

The lascivious monarch gathers comely ladies and resorts to pleasure-ponds for romantic sport. With his pretty consorts, he enters the drinking booths full of bouquets of sweet smelling wine and has his fill.

As a best player of musical instruments, he ravishes the hearts of his hearers by melodious notes. He is an expert in dancing too.

अङ्गसत्ववचनाश्रयं मिथः स्त्रीषु नृत्यमुपधाय दर्शयन् ।
स प्रयोगनिपुणैः प्रयोक्तृभिः संजघर्ष सह मित्रसन्निधौ ॥

Agnivarna has not only taught the women the lessons in gesticulate dancing but he enters into contest with the masters proficient in that art, so as to exhibit his superiority in the very presence of his friends. [*The poet's various detailed descriptions of Agnivarna's amorous sports are very interesting.*

A disease produced by addictedness to libidinous pleasures begins to gradually weaken the king.

दृष्टदोषमपि तन्न सोऽत्यजत् सङ्गवस्तु भिषजामनाश्रवः ।
स्वादुभिस्तु विषयैर्हृतस्ततः दुःखमिन्द्रियगणो निवार्यते ॥

Agnivarna does not pay heed to the advice of his physicians to cast off his pleasure resorts which only land him in evil results. Verily it is difficult to keep off the senses from attractive allurements once they are drawn towards them !

In course of time, the lovelorn King becomes greatly emaciated. The life of frivolity and licenciousness exacts from the monarch a heavy price for his having drunk too deep at the fountain of dissipation. He falls a victim to consumption and dies.

To the good fortune of the Ikshvaku race, one of the Queens is found to be an expectant mother and the hereditary ministers with pompous joy hasten to anoint her as regent on behalf of the child in the embryo.

Thus has Kalidasa's magnificent Raghuvamsa an abrupt ending.

CORRIGENDA

Page	Line	For	Read as
6	15	scences	scenes
19	23	मिच्छ्न्	मिच्छन्
22	1	alone	along
29	6	by his gratitude	by gratitude
33	7	flamebeaus	flambeaus
41	27	Kallinga	Kalinga
44	26	bride	bridegroom
45	21	वभूव	बभूव
46	7	प्रहत्रौंः	प्रहर्षौः
52	2	वाह्यै·	बाह्यैः
53	4	state	State
54	1	शशियप्रतिमा	शशिप्रतिमा
54	9	यथाक्रम	यथाक्रमं
55	33	नयनवारिभिरैव	नयनवारिभिरेव
56	5	वयस्यह मिवेति	वयस्यहमिवेति
57	26	विक्रिय	विक्रियः
66	4	stupefication	stupefaction
67	8	Loathe	Loath
68	31	यायुध	मायुधं
69	5	निधात	निघात
71	2	princessess	princesses
81	16	consumes	consigns
91	5	Sourthern	Southern
99	6	farest	forest
103	6	slur of Sita	slur on Sita
107	14	harrassed	harassed
111	11	impediment of	impediment in
118	18	स्वय	स्वयं
133	28	कर्तृ णि	कर्तॄणि

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